
Language, Literacy and Socio-cultural Studies

Examining Viewer Response to Photographic Imagery: Three Case Studies

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For my mother, Zelma Varner Anderson, and my father, James Harrison Anderson

Their love and support made this project possible.

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EXAMINING VIEWER RESPONSE TO PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGER

THREE CASE STUDIES

BY

JAMES B. ANDERSON

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study is intended to chronicle the evolution of micro historical ethnography as it relates to photography and the photographer's role in data collection. Contained herein is a brief overview of the ever-changing perceptions of what constitutes viable research through the writings of individuals engaged in this process.

Secondly, this study will endeavor to portray how meaning is made by the creator of the photographic image and the two participants, all of whom sought to encode and decode this artifact.

Focus of Study:

(a.) To record the responses of each case study participant as they view specific photographic imagery.

(b.) To analyze possible ways respondents have made meaning from the imagery.

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(c.) To explore pedagogical possibilities as a result of analysis of the data.

Driving Questions:

(a.) Through which ‘filters’ is meaning made by the participants?

(b.) How do participants’ descriptive and emotive appraisals of the imagery correspond and / or differ?

(c.) Through which filters do I analyze participants’ responses?

(d.) Are there pedagogical / educational lessons to be learned from this study?

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FOREWORD

A core feature of ancient Grecian science was research and analysis of how sign systems function. Since those times, humankind's fascination with intra and interpersonal communication systems has fostered sustained inquiry into the mechanics of language and literacy (Cobley & Jansz, 1998.) Envisioning the route taken from eye to object to the formation of mental concepts has led researchers to varying conclusions and sometimes heated debate over principles of perception, cognition, and understanding (Henderson, vonFranz, Jaffe & Jacobi, 1964.)

Technological development over the last century and half has been nowhere more evident than in the field of communications. Over the centuries, continual innovation in printing and general access to written material has expanded with resulting emphasis in its distribution to ever widening audiences. Popular culture may now both be created *by*, and subject *to* its own replication in mass mediated form (Horrocks, 2000.) Where once the Greeks simply concerned themselves with commonalities and differences between natural and conventional (largely human-made) signs, current research now must often focus on such oblique concerns as simulacra, hyper reality, and paroxysm (Cobley, 1997.)

Debate runs strong between rivaling linguistic camps. Contemporary linguists often locate their position through their personal emphasis on either human signs and discourse, or the recognition that the universe is perfused with signs. Neo-Sausserians have formed the

basis for postmodernism, whereas Neo-Pierceans have focused on the symbiotic relationship between human and natural sign.

The ability to alter reality through digital manipulation is always a possibility and serves notice that 'reality' is a fragile and illusive term to be used with caution. Photography is far from an objective act. The photographer first chooses her / his subject matter, then controls to varying degrees what is included in the photograph. Culling, cropping, enlarging, and framing all involve 'editing reality,' which is then further affected by where and how the works are exhibited.

The viewing public brings its own perceptions and insights into this artistic process. Neither the photographer, nor the subjects being photographed, has full control over the imagery presented. The viewer creates her / his reality as a result of their personal interaction with each photograph. The resulting multiple, social construction of 'realities' are reflective of the accumulative, lived experiences of each viewer. Follow-up discussion by the viewers, as a group, serves to further reform 'reality' through discourse. This collective, collaborative process becomes a crucial step, as this dialectical process of sharing insights assists in the potential for creating new understandings for each individual.

The second reason for selecting a photograph of mine for this study is to showcase the importance of visual imagery as a component of multi-modal forms of narrative. Multiple-narratives are one of the techniques favored by interpretive ethnographers, who place great value in the recording of *microhistoria*. Field research used for this paper involved a print of a rarely photographed environment in India.

My original intention was to concentrate on written descriptions of my experiences in the field. Photographs were taken to simply supply corroborating documentation. However, the accumulation of a large cache of images became more important in my data collection process. I began to see the value of the photographs independent of the written text. I did not create a testable hypothesis for this latest trip to Southeast Asia. I did not plan a detailed itinerary for what I wanted to capture on film or record in my journals. Instead, I sought an approach more in keeping with the so-called New Ethnography. This plan called for the use of more or less natural settings to take precedence over structured or contrived performances, with activities of everyday life serving as crucial subject matter.

I am all but convinced that the use of multiple forms of narrative in field research efforts will produce new and important understandings of how social and cultural conditions are created, sustained, and sometimes abandoned in search of new understandings. It is through the investigative vehicles of interpretive ethnography, multi-modal narrative inquiry, and self-study methodologies that I will continue to frame my future research projects.

The type of artifact you now hold in your hands has varied little from its original papyrus form in prehistoric Egypt. It is a communiqué between two individuals in stylized code, undergoing yet another transition in a rippling-effect cycle of transformations, as my collective experience and perspectives will subsequently be interpreted by you through yours. Had it not been paper, perhaps I could have sung, or danced, or created some other symbol system to communicate my emotions, cognitive connections, and other powers and processes that comprise my particular consciousness. I have chosen to use a semiotic system commonly shared by the academic community to order to try to lessen the gulf between our

mutual co-construction of tenuous understandings.

I must initially assume the active role of dispenser of sign and symbol, and you the receptive encoder and decoder of my symbol-message. This transmission is only possible however when you, the interpreter, assign personal meaning to the previously received code. Pendulum-like, this process of engagement between writer and reader will form a dialectical reciprocity, as commonalities and disconnections in this associative and evaluative process of making personal meaning from another's code weaves its convoluted and eccentric web. This process is subject to, and formed by (perhaps) infinite combinations of synapse opportunities, yet uniquely shaped through our personal experiences. The manner in which this co-construction of sign and symbol occurs has been of great interest to me, and has led to many lengthy periods of consideration related to how certain perceptions of "reality" are given precedent over others.

CHAPTER 1:

METHODOLOGY

Focus of Study

The intent of this study was to capture how individuals make sense of a photograph. I did not have any a priori intention to *prove* anything, per se, through this study. I presented an approach quite different from the "prefigured" methodological approach described by Eisner (1981, p. 184). Instead, I used "process studies," which focus on how something

happens, rather than the outcomes or results obtained (Patton, 1995, p. 94). “What we do is less important than how we do it,” says Patton (p. 94).

This type of study used qualitative methodologies, and was not based on the importance of predictability and control (Patton, p. 89), because the methods of narrative inquiry stand on their own as “reasonable ways” to examine phenomenology (p. 90). Using a case study approach has become a “mainstay” of educational research and evaluation over the last thirty years (Merriam, 1988). In my opinion, the gritty, contentious nature of postmodern thought provided the groundwork for a fresh approach to the meaning-making process. I felt Postmodern thought served its purpose by bringing to light certain crucial fallacies behind the Grand Narrative. Postmodernists’ efforts gave birth to the legitimacy of micro historical ethnographic studies.

Case Study Methodology

In this study, I sought to give agency to the narratives of three individuals—including myself (in the multiple role of photographer, participant, and interpreter of the data collection). I believed that narrative inquiry, with its emphasis on vignettes of lived experience, would provide the means through which I could examine each of the participants’ responses to my photograph. I was interested in exploring how each viewer would respond to what they saw in the photograph and what sources they drew from in their personal lives.

This study gave us the opportunity to describe what we saw, to make associations between the images in question and our own experiences, and to interpret these associations in an effort to resolve gaps in our collective funds of knowledge. My driving question was: “How do individuals make meaning from a photograph?” From this point of initial inquiry, I hoped to better know how these individuals respond to imagery, based on phenomenological circumstances and varying forms of verbal and nonverbal communication.

Participants

I selected two participants for my study, with whom I was well acquainted, but whose innermost ideologies and meaning-making systems were relatively unknown to me at the time of data collection. I selected them according to two basic criteria. I predicted that both would give “information-rich, thick description” (Merriam, 2001, p. 29). I sought respondents who were interested in language, literacy, and sociocultural studies. Involving participants acquainted with semiotics was more likely to produce ‘informed’ dialogue about multiple forms of literacy. This procedural measure helped create an opportunity to triangulate data collection in yet another way, through multi-faceted, case-study methodology. I hoped that the participants’ educational, religious, ethnic, and philosophical differences and similarities would make a lively study of human perception and cognition.

MacDonald and Walker (1977, p. 181), and Guba and Lincoln (1981, p. 371) stated that the purpose of case study research is “to reveal the properties of the class to which the

instance being studied belongs.” They indicated that the objectives for case study methodology and narrative analysis using qualitative methods aid in the “comprehensive understanding” of the groups under study. I hoped to accomplish this through a form of case study characterized by Merriam as “particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic” (2001, p. 29).

Over twenty years ago, Stake described how previously unknown relationships and variables could be expected to emerge from a case study such as the one that I undertook. I expected that insights into “how things get to be the way they are” would result from such an approach (Stake, 1981, p. 47). Participants were not necessarily connected by ethnicity, political affiliation, or philosophical / religious compatibility.

Data Collection

In order to obtain the most comprehensive understanding of my participants’ response to my artwork, I approached this study from different angles. I intended to find ways to tap into the respondents’ various forms of intelligence and communicative styles. I used methodological procedures that explored the sociocultural backgrounds of the participants, including myself. I designed procedures that would allow me to gain an understanding of the experiences of each individual. In an effort to see how they made sense of the photograph, I used data collection methods based on several modalities of interpretive ethnography (Denzin, 1981).

I interviewed my participants by showing each participant a photograph of a woman
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from India. I asked each participant to give me a strictly descriptive account of what they saw in the photograph. I requested each participant make associations with what he or she saw. These associations led to more interpretational statements, which were then re-interpreted by me. Each respondent's interpretations produced secondary and tertiary questions, which in turn led to emerging themes. Major themes were then coded prior to data analysis.

I intended to gather at least three hours of audiotape monologues and dialogues, per respondent. I wanted to obtain information about our ages, ethnicities, early childhood backgrounds, as well as differences and similarities between each participant's life experiences. I felt it was important to triangulate my findings through interpretive techniques as articulated by Patton (1990) and Denzin (1986), among others. This triangulation indicated how participants address specific issues related to their lives on an intellectual, emotive, and visceral level.

I asked the following questions of each interviewee:

- 1) Describe to me what you see in the photograph.
- 2) What associations do you make between what you see in the photograph and your own life experiences?
- 3) What inferences do you draw as a result of your examination of the photograph?

I followed these questions with secondary and tertiary questions, which included:

- 4) Describe your historical and sociocultural background.

- 5) What associations can you draw between your lived-experience and what you see in the photograph?
 - 6) What connections or hypotheses can you infer from your response to the photograph?
-

Data Analysis

Patton (1990) noted that by approaching my data collection from different angles, I could gain insight into my participants' points of view. He referred to this methodology as the "mixed form" strategy of data collection, in preparation for analysis (p. 193). Patton (1990, p. 377) cautioned us that there is typically "not a precise point at which data collection ends and data analysis begins". Patton (1990) and others refer to this type of qualitative data collection as a dynamic and elusive entity, ever-changing as new understandings develop and new directions are formulated. I found that analysis is often difficult to separate from strict data collection. The collective energies of the co-participants in this study produced shifting levels of points of importance and relevancy.

Therefore, rather than predict the exact course that my data collection and analysis would take, I intended to implement what Patton called "sensitizing concepts" (1990, p. 391). Patton referred to sensitizing concepts as those that "provide a basic framework highlighting the importance of certain kinds of events, activities, and behaviors" (p. 216).

These sensitizing concepts can often induce and reflect issues of socialization, power,

kinship, etc. and alert us to ways of organizing observations when making decisions about appropriate inclusion of specific data. Blumer (1969, p. 148) noted that these sensitizing concepts could help orient the research through a “general sense of reference” and provide “directions along which to look.”

I saw patterns developing as a result of both the cross current of information due to differences among the participants, as well as any epiphanic moments that each participant experienced. Denzin (1989) thoroughly described the importance of these existential revelations as a precursor to the formulation of mutual understandings.

I could not help but think that there were still multiple options available in this process of coding the data. One approach was to directly analyze and code the participants’ original three-part (descriptive, associative, and interpretive) responses to the photograph in question. A second procedure was to be looking for key themes that appeared from the respondents’ symbolic drawings (P.I.). In actuality, I believed that it seemed likely that the merging of the two approaches and the resulting triangulation would lend itself well to establishing credibility, transferability, and other concerns of academic trustworthiness. I coded themes that I perceived to be emerging from the tapes, while also crosschecking key elements that arose from the “cosmology drawing (P.I.)” that each participant provided. I procured themes from the participants’ multiple forms of expression and data I gathered resulted in unpredictable findings. I intended that the case record in its entirety would allow me to identify, categorize, and collate my findings.

Role of Researcher

The relationship between the interviewer and participant was critical to the success of these interpretive, ethnographic case studies. Patton (1990) referred to an ethnographer's technique as one of "empathetic neutrality." This neutrality did not mean pure objectivity, but rather that the "investigator does not set out to prove a particular perspective or manipulate the data to arrive at predisposed truths" (p. 55). In this proposal, I identified myself not only as the researcher, but also as the photographer who created the work. I was also the individual responsible for collecting and coding data of importance, as well as the analyst of the findings. My own reaction to my photograph, my reaction to what the respondents had to say, and my reaction through the analysis process could not help but influence these multiple roles. As such, I recognized that it was impossible to remain objective throughout the research process. Interpretive ethnography neither paves the road to certainty, nor does it automatically manufacture a blueprint for essentialist conclusions. This particular system of participatory discovery stood at the epicenter of the methodological fault line, due to the "existentially problematic moments in the lives of individuals" and the resulting fragile and tenuous understandings so confounding to the essentialist paradigm (Denzin, 1989, p. 129).

Ethics and Politics

As alluded to earlier, my role as researcher could not be separated from my own

biases. I fully intended to express these biases throughout my dissertation. I produced a mini-biography showcasing part of each participant's belief systems. I expected that these composite "illustrations" of the mindsets of the participants would be full of sociopolitical opinion and quite conceivably contain expressions of faith. In no way did I claim this study would be value-free, distanced, and objective. I believed that subjective thinking was a part of the human condition. A pure form of political and ethical objectivity on the part of the researcher was neither possible nor desired (Merriam, 2001). Lincoln (1981) warned that it is relatively easy for the researcher to skew the data by choosing only those comments that fit a self-created paradigm. This ethical concern, I believed, would be more problematic if I were seeking to justify a specific claim. Thus, I intended that this study would be relatively free of ethical, problematic happenstance. Merriam (2001) reminds us, ethical concerns extend into the area of how the researcher conducted her or his interviewing and interpretation of the data collection. I realized that as researcher, I must abstain from being a seemingly disinterested outsider, nor from attempting to influence the participants' innermost perceptions, values, and beliefs.

Trustworthiness

Traditional methodological research systems were rated on their ability to be reproduced under like-circumstances (Denzin, 1989). More recently, interpretive ethnographers such as Lincoln and Guba (1981), Patton (1990), and Merriam (2001) have insisted that reproducibility is not the point of trustworthiness. Merriam (2001) stated that

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the object of credibility of a case study is not whether it can be reproduced in identical fashion, but whether the study is true to itself. Issues of triangulation, verification, and member checking at appropriate intervals, as well as the accuracy with which I recorded what was expressed to me by my participants was really the intended objective.

Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to a case study as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). This bounded context was both dynamic and self-generating, so issues of transferability could not be established on a universal level. Rather, epiphanies, in the Denzinian sense, occurred at any moment and produced ruptures of new knowledge when least expected. Issues of dependability did not lie in the creation of a body of work espousing blanket truisms that could be applied to future cases. Instead, I believed that the dependability of this study rested on my shoulders. My task was to accurately reflect the expressed opinions and beliefs of my participants.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Recording history in an orderly, linear way can poorly reflect the actuality of lived experience. Despite well-intentioned, western chronologies, the concept of a time continuum runs counter to many non-western cultures. In reality, life is messy and unresolved, and attempts to capture its proceedings in a neat, sequential package prove all but fruitless. In the end, issues of how individuals and cultures select certain events, deem

them important, and interpret their significance remain a matter of subjectivity, despite the insistence by traditional historians that observations should be recorded through a detached, objective sense of equanimity.

Western ideology has assumed without much debate that European history serves us well in organizing data-- to the virtual exclusion of crucial events happening elsewhere. Instead, controversial issues over whether or not art is superior to science, determinism inferior to relativism, or secular humanism more justifiable than religious historicism, have remained the focus of much attention, while providing endless hours of debate among scholars and laypersons alike.

Waging a War of Words

It is precisely this type of debate-- essentialist and existentialist thought coming to loggerheads in the postmodern era-- that serves as an undercurrent for this study. Secondly, the mechanics of how these differences have been deduced and reformulated must be examined in order to articulate specific features of semiotic development. Iggers notes Hayden White's contention that while (micro) historical writing "proceeds from empirically validated facts or events, it necessarily requires imaginative steps to place them within a coherent story" (White in Iggers, 1997, p. 3). Essentialists' contention that Pure Reason produces Ultimate Truth has served more as a "means of control and manipulation" rather than as science (Iggers, 1997, p. 13). Objections to essentialism produced a lineage of early

twentieth century historiographers that included Burckhardt, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and the Frankfurt School's Adorno and Horkheimer, among others (Iggers, 1997, p. 13).

Ranke recognized the discrepancies between his efforts to produce value-free judgments and certain "metaphysical speculations" determined by his personal, subjective critical methodology (Iggers, 1997, p. 25). Yet in doing so, he maintained revulsion for positivistic approaches seeking "the establishment of facts as the essential task of the historian's work" (Iggers, 1997, p. 25). Rejecting Weber's belief that values were relative and therefore never ironclad, Ranke aligned himself with Hegel's view that the results of historical growth constituted "moral energies" (Iggers, 1997, p. 25-6).

Hegel asserted that, in Plant's words, "the process of dialectical development turns into another because contradictions are revealed in previous forms" (1999, p. 25). Hegel employed a method that entailed a proposition or thesis, followed by an antithetical supposition to challenge the first premise, which then formed a new hybrid understanding, or synthesis. This newly created thesis was then challenged by a new antithetical proposition, and so on. Through these intellectual gymnastics, it was argued, an ultimate form of understanding could conceivably be realized through pure Mind (Collinson, 1987). Later, post-Hegelian thought proved influential in Vygotskian forms of sociocultural theory (Tucker, 1978; Cohen, 1978).

In Phenomenology of Spirit (p. 464), Hegel states that (religious) philosophy becomes the foundation for an "accomplished community of consciousness" (Plant, 1999, p. 50). This was not accomplished merely through the "elaboration of a set of general principles", but rather was "rooted in our personal, social, and cultural experience", which

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then formed the basis “for a common life” (Plant, 1999, p. 50). Through this dialectical process each individual formed an interpretation of “what is”, and through this interpretation transformed and transfigured consciousness into new understandings (Plant, 1999, p. 50).

First Rumbblings of Relativism

Buckle made the claim that human’s function according to patterns rather than through the exercising of free will (Wilson, 1999, p. 13). According to Buckle, human tendencies and activities must be understood more in terms of the behavior of a colony of ants than as a voluntary enterprise (Wilson, 1999, p. 12). Spring-boarding off the work of Comte, Buckle accepted his counterpart’s first two premises that: a “theological hypothesis” was a foundation for the theory of predestination with its “doctrine of necessary connection” or “supernatural interference,” and that this “metaphysical hypothesis” was a foundation for a “theory of free will,” with its “doctrine of Chance” (Comte, unpublished, p. 6-10). Buckle then added a third proposition, leading to a “scientific truth” in which a theory of uniformity and regularity of human behavior would lead to “fixed general laws” (Wilson, 1999, p. 17).

In the early nineteenth century, Johann Gottfried Von Herder offered another historical perspective by stating that one simply cannot compare the past with the present (Wilson, 1999, p. 14). Von Herder’s emphasis on the organic development of unique cultures stood at odds with Hume’s ethnocentric assurance that French and German thought was an extension of a superior, Greco-Roman model (Wilson, 1999, p. 14). By rejecting the

Enlightenment claim of a universal human nature, Von Herder provided a *contra*-absolutist point of view, while heralding the advent of historio-cultural relativism (Wilson, 1999, p. 14).

“Outing” Relativism

On this point, Geertz concurs, “believing, with Max Weber, that (a hu)man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). Further, Geertz worked within the conception of a culture as an “integrated, semiotic system”, although, as Iggers points out, one which lacks “differentiation and conflict” (Iggers, 1997, p. 107). Nevertheless, Geertz’s work is often highly praised for its timeliness in a domain which had, up to that point, largely resisted *microhistoria* as a viable investigative tool (Iggers, 1997, p. 107).

Noting that the grander the grand narrative the greater the opportunity for the events to be invented rather than found, White rejected history as science (White in Iggers, 1997, p. 10). Likewise, Kellner’s critique of authority culminated in an understanding that “truth and reality are the primary authoritarian weapons of our time” (Kellner, 1982, p. 31).

“Deconstruction”, as coined by Derrida, was principally adopted by neo-Marxist authors in the late 1970s, and was studied and widely discussed among New Historicists throughout the 1980s (Sim, 1999). One notable difference between Hegelian dialectics and Derridean deconstruction, however, seems to be a gulf in the degree of concern regarding the

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emphasis of logic through syllogism. Baudrillard, for example, seemed comfortable in retracting his own key statements in rather cavalier fashion, while arguing that our present life condition, that of hyper reality, is of its own nature unreal, illogical, and falsified (Horrocks, 1999).

Early Developments in Reverse-Discourse

Tension created by the varying degrees of emphasis placed on macro history and micro history has been reflected in a shift from macro studies to microstoria as a form of research inquiry. Reacting to traditional Marxism, neo-Marxists Ginsburg, Poni, Levi, and Grendi sought to “give history a human face” (Iggers, 1997, p. 107). Their commitment to microstoria was “to open up history to peoples who would be left out by other methods” and “to elucidate historical causation on the level of small groups where most of life takes place” (Muir in Iggers, 1997, p. 108).

Elements of interpretive ethnography, multi-modal semiotics, image-based theory and research, and a general application of relativistic inquiry have served to irritate and confound late-modern positivists, who cling tenuously to visions of historical cohesion. Their faith in a grand narrative has been questioned by Foucault and others who insist that history has no unity, but is marked by “ruptures”, which in turn create a dynamic and highly unstable platform from which to launch a “reverse discourse” (Spargo, 1999, p. 21). As Sim indicated, “one can not successfully police meaning or history; nor can one offer complete

interpretations of them” (Sim, 1999, p. 50).

Darkrooms Shed Light

The last half-century of the twentieth century became an important period for the development and widespread usage of technology to record micro histories. Seemingly, most American families own some form of photographic apparatus, as prices have become more affordable. Today, photographic equipment ranges from disposable mini-cameras to sophisticated, digital camcorders, and these apparatus are used in every corner of the globe. A camera is now in the possession of anyone who ventures into the streets to record history. Belief systems are tested daily in light of new evidence produced not by professionals, but laypersons in the field.

With this understanding in mind, certain photojournalists seek to bulldoze the relationship between history and the science-based, educational cult d’ sac that Bell (1962) referred to earlier. In doing so, postmodern historicists hope to forge a crack in a formidable facade of self-generated certainty that has proven to be a deterrent to alternative understandings about micro history’s place within the parameters of lived experience.

Using cameras as a technological instrument in social constructions of sign and symbol, photographers illustrate how imagery has come to influence ideology. Through this medium, a postmodern concern for deconstructing how reality is manufactured can be critically analyzed by photo-ethnographers, whose lenses capture the imagery of a world

represented in a state of suspended animation.

The Industrial Age morphed into the Technological Age, and certain key inventions served as markers for change. Photography has been such an integral part of the post-modernization process that we now routinely use words like “focus”, “lens”, “develop”, “frame”, and “filter” to describe elements of our thought processes. The camera and its offspring, the video cam, have become a prime source for information gathering and have, in turn, served to shape the way in which televisuals have been employed to alter and recast public opinion. This phenomenon underscores the steady technological growth and sophistication of contemporary photography when compared to its initial appearance in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

The ever-skeptical Lyotard gave evidence of a ‘left-handed’ sense of hope by reminding us that “modernity in whatever age it appears, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the lack of reality, together with the invention of other realities” (Lyotard in Waugh, 1992, p. 121). If society is experiencing visual heartburn from ingesting more mass solicitation than it can digest, perhaps relief is on the way.

Often regarded as a post-structuralist photographer, Roland Barthes claimed that the function of photography is to “inform, represent, surprise, signify and provoke desire” (Barthes, 1981, p. 28). It is through his renegade approach that the camera can conceivably become a subversive tool for positive change. Visual imagery can be used to break up the social stalemate of the status quo-- to rectify a septic condition transmitted from the waste products emerging from the a-theoretical bowels of an image-drenched public. These feisty Frenchmen do appear to concur that *if* our Prime Time Public should ever awaken from

hibernation, the shock value of imagery might illustrate “cameras, in short, are clocks for seeing” (Barthes, 1981, p. 15). Barthes (1981, p. 85) also notes that the “photograph’s essence is to ratify what it represents.” I suggest that photojournalism might serve witness during any initial attempts on the viewing public’s part to kick, among other additions, the habit of unbridled consumption and blind acceptance of tele-punditry skillfully recast and marketed as “news”.

In the Foucaultian sense, “power is a multiplicity of contradictory relations immanent in all cultural forms” and is always in a state of flux (Foucault referenced by Jameson, in Waugh, 1992, p. 114). Crucial to Foucault’s understanding of this social dilemma is the notion that our contemporary, mass-mediated superstructure, which seems so vast and omnipotent when viewed from under the shadows of massive skyscrapers and other graven images of corporate opulence, must and will change-- one way or the other.

Stepping Back in Time

Exactly one hundred years elapsed between the first appearance of a photograph and the release of *The Psychology of Art* in 1925, penned by the Russian scholar, psychologist, artist, and researcher Lev S. Vygotsky. That year marked the release of Vygotsky’s study of the processes by which imagery engages and transforms people-- a task to which he had applied himself from 1915 to 1922. Vygotsky’s post-doctoral work resulted in his decade-long search dedicated to the study of the production, criticism, history, and aesthetics of art,

which in turn became an early but seminal piece in the development of a fresh, neo-Marxian perspective in the field of psychology.

Reflective of his wide range of interests and intellectual aptitudes, Vygotsky sought to link issues from disciplines traditionally thought to be mutually exclusive. He saw commonalities among the arts, science, physiology, economics, psychology, and other such fields while providing critiques of established educational belief systems.

With ever-increasing frequency, photography had been used as a form of historical documentation since the turn of the twentieth century. During Vygotsky's life span, cinema was confined to "talkies," newsreels, and other early attempts at filmmaking. Thus, when speaking of art and its various manifestations, Vygotsky was inclined to write about music, dance, poetry, painting and other more traditional forms of creative outlet. His findings, however, form an excellent fit with the imagery produced by photography and cinematography, and has served as a highly innovative precursor to postmodern thought.

Vygotskian forays into sociocultural relativism would, in time, help redefine a Marxist position on psychoanalytic theory, Formalism, German idealism, and other 'sacred cows' of the late-Modern era. It is for these reasons, that the collected works of Vygotsky, while seldom edited to a high sheen (due to his idiosyncratic, scrap-paper notations,) have endured to provide the impetus for a continuing dialectic regarding the psychology of art production, criticism, aesthetics, and history.

Visual Imagery for the Masses

Dissatisfied with certain stigma associated with the artistic process, Vygotsky sought to remove the classist element of art by de-mystifying the aura surrounding its production. Ever mindful of the usurping of ‘fine art’ as a symbol of social status, Vygotsky expanded the concept of art production to embody the creative act as an expression of and by *any* social individual (Vygotsky, 1925). In neo-Vygotskian terminology, the cognitive / affective processes produced by the creatist [né artist] come to fruition through the re-creatist [né the spectator / viewer] (Connery, 2000), who constructs new knowledge through the allegorical connections reflected in the art piece (Vygotsky, 1925).

Image and Catharsis

Transubstantiation, in the Vygotskian sense is intensely personal and existential, yet intimately associated with social interaction. Vygotsky noted that art’s true nature is “something that transcends *ordinary* feelings; for the fear, pain, or excitement caused by art includes something above and beyond its normal conventional content” (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 243). This cathartic quality of art, however, bears little resemblance to the Kantian or Cartesian model of the *sublime*; a condition of the intellect through which transcendental awareness of the significance of a work of art is considered the comprehension of a static, time-honored, universal truth, through the application of pure Reason. To the contrary, Vygotsky held that all life conditions were in a constant state of flux, and that change was

inherent in all constructs (Vygotsky, 1925). In this respect, Vygotsky employed a form of post-Hegelian dialectics as a way to insure a high level of dynamism in the pursuit of knowledge-- a knowledge that, in Vygotskian terms, is unachievable without locating oneself within the woven fabric of the social mind (Vygotsky, 1925).

Transubstantiation served to distance Vygotskian sociocultural theory from the Neo-Platonic idealism so prevalent during his time. Whereas the Kantian notion of the *sublime* dealt with the “ripening” of the intellect to accommodate a higher truth inherent in the aesthetics of a given art piece, Vygotsky elected to view art as the physical manifestation of an idea-in-motion (Vygotsky, 1925). Through this dynamic, triadic relationship between creatist / artwork / re-creatist (viewer), photography can serve as a catalyst for the crystallization of meaning deeply rooted in the psycho-sensory process (Vygotsky, 1925).

In this pursuit, the organization of stimuli has been deliberately arranged by the creatist to elicit an aesthetic reaction from the viewer (Vygotsky, 1925). This aesthetic reaction is not to be confused with the Cartesian belief that the form of the artwork alone is sufficiently imbued with a static, universal power capable of delivering an irrefutable Truth to the viewer. In the words of Leontiev (1981), “knowledge is not internalized directly, but through the use of psychological tools”. Vygotsky further explained, “what we are unable to understand immediately and directly can be understood in a roundabout way, allegorically” (Vygotsky, 1925).

Transubstantiation is a specific cognitive function that first takes place within the consciousness of the creatist, but which is then braided with the lived-experience of the re-creatist to form the co-constructed environment within which new knowledge is formed

(Vygotsky, 1925). Reminiscent of Wittgenstein, Wertsch (1991) refers to this semiotic transference as a “socially provided tool kit” indispensable to the process by which tools and aids help develop “streams of internalized language and conceptualized thought that sometimes run parallel and sometimes merge” with those intended by the creatist (Bruner, 1996, p.7). Please note that some neo-Vygotskian semioticians refer to an artist as “creatist”, and the viewer as “recreatist” to try to emphasize the collaborative nature of meaning making. That specific terminology is used in this manuscript whenever the author I cite prefers its usage.

Vygotskian thoughts on the relationship between creatist and recreatist foreshadowed postmodern viewpoint exemplified by neo-Marxian scholars of the late twentieth century. These contemporary writers’ insistence upon a dynamic set of relative truths has challenged the notion of a totalitarian ideology touting a ‘one size fits all’ paradigm devoid of critical, sociocultural considerations. Rather than accepting the dichotomous notion that mind and body, intellect and emotion, individual and society are separate entities, Vygotskian principles stress the interconnectedness of all psycho-physiological processes (Vygotsky, 1925). Through this paradigm, knowledge is not simply a matter of comprehending a fixed understanding of Reality, but rather the keen observation of the complicated interplay of human perceptions, emotions, imagination, and fantasy (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 199). These inner-workings of the social mind involve an integrated approach toward *how* meaning is made. “Since the intellect is nothing but inhibited will, we might possibly think of imagination as inhibited feeling” (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 48).

A work of art reflects (rather than *form*-ulates) a topic, idea, or concept, which is then

compared and contrasted with pre-existing schema, derived from experience (Vygotsky, 1925; Bruner, 1996; Dewey, 1938). Vygotsky elaborates: “Once we establish that the crux of the matter, so to speak, is not the content planned by the (creativist) but that attributed to it by the (recreativist), it becomes obvious that the content of the work of art is a dependent and variable quality, a function of (the) psycho-social (hu)man” (Vygotsky, 1925, p.39).

Thus, in terms of empirical psychology, “emotion is beyond the domain of consciousness”, because “everything that cannot be fixed within the attentional focus is pushed to the extreme limits of the conscious” (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 200). Whereas Cartesian absolutists such as Christiansen (Christiansen, referenced in Vygotsky, 1925, p. 206) maintained that “any action of the external world” entails a specific “sensorial and moral effect”, Vygotsky stated that “art arises originally as a powerful tool in the struggle for existence; the idea of reducing (art’s) role to a communication of feeling with no power or control over that feeling is inadmissible” (Vygotsky, 1925 p. 245).

Vygotsky sought to locate phenomena within the parameters of his emerging sociocultural and psychological theories. His leanings indicated a “shift away from formalist, analytical positions-- functionalism, structuralism, and so forth-- toward more phenomenological perspectives” (Banks, in Prosser, 1988, p. 9). In order to show that irrefutable, empirical knowledge was not necessarily sole property of scholars, Vygotsky emphasized that “the psychologist may, at best, reach the stage of analysis; he has absolutely no access to the synthesis of an aesthetic response” (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 205). Through this admission, Vygotsky illustrated that “sociocultural approaches are distinguished by the importance they place on cultural variation and its interrelationship with development”

(John-Steiner & Panofsky, 1992, p. 247). Vygotsky refuted the notion of Grant-Allen that “aesthetics are those emotions which have freed themselves from association with practical interests” (Grant-Allen, in Vygotsky, 1925, p. 247). Rather, Vygotsky “conceptualized development as the transformation of socially shared activities into internalized processes” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1995).

Braiding Image Theory with Sociology

Occurring simultaneously with the work of Vygotsky came the growth and development of sociology as a recognized, ‘scientific’ discipline (Harper, 1993). By the time *Psychology of Art* was first published in 1925, photography had found a strong niche within accepted forms of sociological research methodology (Harper in Prosser, 1998). Much of that acceptability hinged on the perception that photography would form the basis for alleged value-free chronicling of data. Image-based research, through photography, found itself “with one foot in the old traditions,” and was considered at the time as a “simple... truth-revealing mechanism” (Edwards, 1992, p. 4).

Harper is quick to note how sociology embraced the proliferation of camera usage as “conventions of the ‘realist tale’-- taken-for-granted in traditional ethnography-- (to solve) obscure problems inherent in the anthropologist’s attempts to gain scientific legitimacy” (Harper in Prosser, 1998). Methodological procedures in the field suggested that inclusion of the camera would provide an objective tool with which to decipher sign and symbol.

Through rigorous examination of data, the researcher was believed to be assured of reliable and reproducible findings, which would then serve to bolster understandings perhaps undermined through more subjective research approaches (Becker, 1986, p. 252).

Photography as Evidentiary Tool: On Temporary Hiatus

By the time of Vygotsky's death in 1935, much of the excitement caused by inclusion of photographic imagery had waned (Becker, 1986). Collier (1967, p. x) claimed that the camera had become "incidental to research activity" and that the camera was not so much a research technique as it was "a highly selective confirmation that certain things are so, or as a very selective sample of reality." A division between positivism and relativism was crystallized through varying perceptions of what constitutes a sense of truth. "It is a contentious field, deeply divided between those searching for universal features of the mind, and those who see human activity grounded in historical and cultural experiences" (John-Steiner, 1996). John-Steiner's position runs counter to the more traditional concept of a dichotomous, analytical separation of form and meaning, which has, in certain circles, continued to foster the perceived notion of the "sociocultural neutrality" of photographic reproduction (Banks in Prosser, 1998, p. 17).

The Formalists' approach toward imagery suggested to Vygotsky that such ideologies "intend(ed) to construe the theories outside sociological and psychological foundations" (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 52). In doing so, Formalists viewed "the artistic form as

something completely objective, independent of thoughts, ideas, feelings, and other psychological material of which the forms exist” (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 56). Casting the photo-ethnographer as an incidental bystander during any process of image production has been strongly refuted by Baudry (1970, p. 537) and others, who insisted that “there are no socially neutral techniques” in image-based research. Echoing the sentiments of numerous ‘interactionist’ theorists, Banks (in Prosser, 1998, p. 15) has also found the assumption of photography and film routinely capturing ‘Reality’ highly problematic, because such positivist “unidirectional transmission freezes debate” (Wertsch & Stone, 1985, p. 163).

Consequently, much of the anthropological approach to film and photography “has been largely anti-aesthetic and focused upon the technological and methodological” (Banks in Prosser, 1998, p. 14). This ‘scientific’ approach approximates the Deweyan notion of ‘anesthetics,’ in which researchers seek a form of sanitized positivism (Dewey, 1938). Traweek notes that such educators “long passionately for a world without loose ends, without temperament, gender, nationalism... and (seek) extreme cultures of objectivity” (Traweek, 1988, p. 162).

Photo-Ethnographer and Bias

Derry (1996) has indicated that cognitive constructivist research and practice has intended to place the individual under observation within the context of her / his natural environment. Much of this movement has occurred as a result of the pioneering work of

Mead in the 1940's, which offered a novel paradigm in direct contrast to earlier attempts to understand indigenous groups through a decidedly Western lens. Mead's ethnographic studies did serve to broaden and question accepted methodological practice, but her much-copied field praxis fell short of the Vygotskian concern for specifically locating each subject within a larger social context. Mead was conscious of the need to develop rapport with the target group in question in order to more successfully legitimate her findings. Her approach served to lessen the gulf between observer and those being observed. Many researchers who have followed, however, maintain a view of cognition that "lacks the lived-in qualities of intimacy, engagement, conflict, and negotiation. Their view resembles other analytical dichotomies separating interrelated human experiences, such as the separation of thinking from feeling, or the individual from culture" (John-Steiner, 2000, p.195). In this manner, current research strategies valued by sociocultural theorists stand "in opposition to the more traditional reliance on universal cognitive algorithms" (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 194).

Photo Imagery as Socio-Historiographical Artifact

According to Vygotsky, art is "subject to the general law of historical evolution, at least in its substantial parts" (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 41). Sociocultural theory holds that "human activities take place in cultural contexts, that they are mediated by language and other symbol systems, and can best be understood when investigated in their historical development" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Further, communicative networks are formed when "acts of representation are embedded in social practice and rely on socially developed

semiotic means. Ecology, history, culture, and family organization play roles in patterning experience and events” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

Through this perspective, Vygotsky noted, “formalists fail to understand the final significance of the rules of estrangement... (therefore failing to understand) the psychological significance of the material” (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 57). Aspects of estrangement were also extended to encompass the ontogenic, phylogenic and sociocultural aspects of humankind, which are at once the ill effect of inequity and the vehicle for potential psychosocial evolution (Vygotsky, 1925). One’s estranged relationship to oneself-- one’s biologic and / or psychosocial positionality--serves as both an irritant and a healing mechanism in the meaning-making process. Although some Essentialists seek to align themselves with a quick-fix dogma, “there can be no universal schema that adequately represents the dynamic relation between external and internal aspects of development” (John-Steiner & Souberman, 1978).

As participants in contemporary society, we are bombarded, each and every day, with imagery from countless directions. Vygotsky, using the analogy of five trains entering a tunnel with only room for one to exit, has indicated that “the world pours into (a hu)man through the wide opening of a funnel..... thousands of calls, desires, stimuli, etc. enter, but only an infinitesimal part of them is realized and flows out through the tiny opening” (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 54). Photography provides a special impetus for transubstantiation to occur-- a deeply reflective consideration of seemingly disjointed input in need of (re)organization.

In order to accommodate and arrange such stimuli into a cohesive semblance of
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order, “dialectics surmounts dichotomies by looking at phenomena as synthesis of contradictions” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). “Art”, Vygotsky wrote, “ simultaneously generates in us opposing affects which acts according to the principle of antithesis and sends opposite impulses” (1925, p. 213). Analysis of this process recognizes the need for “an integrative mode of thinking aimed at overcoming the Cartesian ghosts of dualism and dichotomy” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 100). Dialectical processes present “world pictures which balance each other and constantly need modification” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 100).

Image Theory as Mind in Society

Working, in part, from the principles outlined by pragmatist George Herbert Mead, Vygotsky “believed that thought develops first through interdependence with others and later is internalized” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 188). Creating new knowledge does not occur in a void. “Joint mediated activity is the proper unit of psychological analysis and hence, is inherently socially shared” (Cole, in John-Steiner, 2000, p. 192). Although Marx has often been misquoted and misunderstood, Kushner exclaimed, “Marx was right. The smallest indivisible unit is two people, not one” (Kushner, in John-Steiner, 2000, p. 64).

Such collaborative ventures have been thoroughly analyzed by Vygotsky, whose conceptualization of the zone of proximal development has led to an increased understanding of the positive advancement of learning in a social context. The relationship between peers, between ‘master’ and mentor, or between groups, offers an opportunity for interactive

meaning making to occur. In many cases, art acts as the catalyst for a very different form of jointly mediated knowledge building. As a crucial element in the social construction of understanding, “a need arises from time to time to discharge unused energy and give it full reign in order to reestablish our equilibrium with the rest of the world” (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 246).

Photography allows for a shared vision between creatist and recreatist, as well as the opportunity for “complimentary” collaborators to offer their particular, unique approaches to facilitate deeper cognition. As Vygotsky put it, “initially an emotion is individual and only by means of a work of art does it become social or generalized” (Vygotsky, 1925, p. 242). In this way, photography acts as an important component of the zone of proximal development.

Kozulin emphasizes that “the internalization of social interaction in the construction of knowledge (leads to a) dynamic interdependence of social and individual processes” (Kozulin, 1990, p. 87). This process of internalization of stimuli is not an instantaneous phenomenon. “We may call art a delayed reaction”, wrote Vygotsky (1925, p. 253). “He (Hennequin) is correct in saying that aesthetic emotion does not immediately generate action, that it manifests itself in the change of purpose” (Hennequin referenced in Vygotsky, 1925, p. 250). This ‘change of purpose’, which Vygotsky has identified as a pivotal element in the creative / recreative process, has its roots firmly planted in psychosocial interaction. “Socialization practices prevalent in contemporary Western society emphasize competition and the adversarial mode of self-presentation” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 100). This need to view the socialization process as one of competitive one-ups-manship, may well be a

virulent form of alienation illustrative of the “frequently neglected role of mutuality” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 92).

Feldman offers a possible solution to this debilitating feature of competitive individualism by stating that “the purpose of cultural organisms.... (is) to organize existing knowledge and to provide the challenge and the context for individual and joint creativity” (Feldman, in John-Steiner, 2000, p. 88). This “collective sense-making,” as defined by Weick, “is a need to act in order to think... where shared experience leads to engagement with culture” (Weick, in John-Steiner, 2000, p. 193). As certain ethnic groups redefine themselves in opposition and resistance to racist, classist, and gendered forms of elitism, we are reminded that in our current state of divisive factionalism and heightened forms of individualism we have created an “unproductive autonomy” (Wertsch, 1998).

“Partners need to shed some of their cultural heritage, such as the powerful belief in a separate, independent self and in the glory of individual achievement” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 204), while in doing so, contribute more fully to the well-being of a community in search of a healing pedagogy. Through this process, “a cooperative structure is formed and reformed in order to enhance the possibilities for discovery, development, and (occasionally) optimal expression of human talents in various domains” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 191).

Image Theory: Toward a Social Catharsis

This process of neutralizing the effects of self-estrangement could conceivably be
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accomplished through specific techniques, which allow one to be “liberated from the prison of the self” (Bennis & Biederman, in John-Steiner, 2000, p. 188). John-Steiner adds, “through collaboration, we can transcend the constraints of biology, of time, of habit, and achieve a fuller self, beyond the limitations and the talents of the isolated individual” (2000, p. 188). Catharsis allows for the transformation of passion into virtue (Lessing, in Vygotsky, 1925, p. 213), a transition from displeasure to pleasure (Muller, in Vygotsky, 1925, p. 213), healing and purification in the medical sense (Bernay, in Vygotsky, 1925, p. 213), and the appeasement of “affect” (Zeller, in Vygotsky, 1925, p. 213). It is within these varying locations of the ontogenic, phylogenic and psychosocial self that truly meaningful change can “contribute to the realization of human possibility” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 187).

In our contemporary setting, a strict definition of art has come to be viewed as problematic. Traditional considerations of art, dictated by late-modernist concerns for form and function, are now hotly contested issues. As corporate financial interests, backed by a corporate-owned media continue to inundate our lives with not-so-subliminal consumerism, one might sense an urgency to not only resist modes of conspicuous consumption, but to deconstruct the accumulative ill-effects of terminal *affluenza*. Radicalized photo imagery provides such a vehicle.

Image Theory and Visual Anthropology

Banks (in Prosser, 1998, p. 19) believes that visual anthropology is more than a

pedagogic strategy or a tool to be used in certain fieldwork contexts: “Rather it is an exploration by the visual, through the visual of human sociality, a field of social action which is enacted in planes of time and space, through objects and bodies, landscapes and emotions, as well as thought” (Banks in Prosser, 1998, p. 19). Regarding any possible ‘misunderstandings of purpose’, catharsis through the collaborative process “gives voice to contradictory and dilemmatic aspects of team practice” (Middleton in John-Steiner, 2000, p. 89).

Photography and cinematography have come to the forefront as avenues for transmission of competing ideologies. The scope and sphere of influence of imagery is now fully global in nature, which becomes problematic in light of the fervor with which corporations vie for consumers’ attention. Photographic iconography, acting as agency for both proactive and counterproductive forms of meaning making, is at the heart of this (relatively) new art form. Image-based research offers an opportunity for practitioners to weigh the merits of a methodology which seeks to better understand the use of photographic technology as a semiotic tool capable of engaging the creatist / recreatist in a co-constructed comprehension of sign and symbol. It is through this semiotic process that iconographic symbolism is deciphered and the ideological structures that are embedded in the imagery recognized, analyzed, and internalized by the viewer.

CHAPTER THREE:

SAM’S STORY: AN ANALYTICAL RESPONSE

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Sam is a big man. At 6'3", 275 lbs., he casts a long, broad shadow. "Big men understand size", he once told me. "It's the little man who generally wants to pick a fight." A former collegiate Division II interior lineman for a Colorado college, he knows all about physicality. Now, after thirteen major surgeries, he walks with a halted gait and prefers holding his newborn baby, rather than a football.

Sam defies any stereotype associated with large stature. He enjoys studying minutia. A veteran of over two hundred open-sea dives, he has enjoyed the company of prowling hammerhead sharks, but prefers to hover in one spot, eyeing the activities of a miniscule crustacean at work. He is a master at tying his own 'dry flies', a hobby requiring a great deal of dexterity and fine motor skills. Muscling a huge game fish into a powerboat doesn't work for Sam. I've watched him sitting peacefully at water's edge for hours, fishing with no fishing pole. "Oh, I'm fishing, all right," he told me. His idea of 'catch and release' doesn't necessarily involve hooking anything. For him, watching trout 'rise' *is* the sport. Casting the line in front of a fish's face is just window dressing.

Sam identifies strongly with his upbringing on the eastern slope of Colorado. He has an extended family background "rooted in the American West." His family tree consists of hard-working folk whose occupations primarily consisted of mining and cattle production. He comes from hearty Irish, French, and Welch stock. "I'm also 1/8th Native blood, but not socialized that way," he adds.

His father is a soft-spoken, modest man who worked for decades for the United States Navy as a recruiter. His mother, now deceased, was a very caring and giving woman.

She was passionate about pro football and loved her Broncos. She was more outwardly demonstrative of her feelings than Sam's father, and not at all afraid to voice her opinion. When my own father died a few years ago, I received one letter of condolence. It was from Sam's mother.

"I think I get my sensitivity from my mother," noted Sam.

"I come from a conservative background. We believe in the wise use of natural resources. The land made us. The land was and is harsh. There's no hiding from responsibility. We learned to take personal responsibility for our actions. My ancestors didn't need to rely on governmental social order and assistance. We believed in community, the functional part of society.... not the Lone F-ing Ranger or John F-ing Wayne. We believe in a strong work ethic because we come from frontier stock. The geography of the area (my family grew up in) was rough and it taught us tolerance. It required cooperation."

I asked Sam to help self-identify his sex and gender. "Well, I have a penis, so therefore I am male. But I am probably more like my mom in temperament. I'm heterosexual and enjoy women's company. I like the scent and the shape of women."

I asked him to position himself on a political scale. "I am extremely conservative, right wing to the Nth degree, with just a tinge of liberalism. The brand of conservatism I am talking about is what I call *true* conservatism. It means making fewer policies and then making those policies more meaningful. As I said, it means taking full responsibility for oneself. This is a big part of true conservatism. I am conservative for fiscal reasons. I believe in voter responsibility, and I believe we should hold programs accountable. Now,

socially speaking I am a civil libertarian, except that I do not agree with some of Libertarian's weird tax proposals.”

I put my pencil down, stopped the recorder for a minute and we took a break. I had known Sam for well over a decade, and I was still trying to understand how he aligned himself with the conservative movement. After all, he was against the Iraq war, against Reagan, Bush I, Bush II, against FOX News, against the Religious Right, and many other organizations typically referred to as ‘conservative.’ I found the conundrum quite fascinating.

We picked up our conversation again. I asked him to tell me about his religious or philosophical beliefs. “I quit trying to categorize myself, because I have assimilated much over the years. A dogmatic approach can be oppressive. I think my Baptist roots were reinforced through my mother, but I have boiled Christianity down to its basics. I believe in trying to live like Christ and have a simple ‘devotion to life’.”

“Christian dogma is so abstract. I am attracted to Back-to-Basics-Buddhism. But I also need a place to hang my hat of metaphysical thought. I have learned much from “Phil B.” (a Navajo medicine man of the Spider / Mexican Clan) about the Four Worlds and the basis of nature. Being *of* nature and being *of* culture.”

“Issues of the Soul... the Collective Consciousness. That which is unexplainable-- the sub-conscious Mind. Perhaps, herein lies *faith* as well. The beauty is in the “us”, and our purpose on earth... our purpose as part of the Whole. Baptists call it God and the Navajo call it the Great Spirit. Can't we tie the whole thing together?”

He paused for a moment. “Years ago, when I was in Thailand, a Buddhist monk told me that to speak of a Superior Being is considered disrespectful. I am uncomfortable talking about (God) in any prosthelityzing way. To cheapen...”. His voice drifted toward silence.

We sat for a moment, watching the shadows dance on the wall from a flickering candle, as it finally sputtered and died out. I figured I’d get him to “flesh out” this notion of speaking about a Supreme Being at a later date. Two and a half hours had raced by. I sensed our first interview had found it’s appropriate ending. We hugged and I gathered my things. I drove back to New Mexico.

A few weeks later, we met again in Durango. We each had rooms at the quaint Rochester Hotel, which at one time had been a brothel. The following morning, I conducted another interview. This time, I brought a couple of items I wanted him to examine. One was a list of words I had written down on a piece of paper. The other was one of my photographs. I started with the photograph of the funeral pyre.

I brought it over near a Victorian lamp, and propped it up on the headstand of the brass bed. Sam drew a chair up to the side of the bed and gazed at the photo intently. I turned on the tape recorder and prepared to jot down notes as the tape ran. “Please describe what you see”, I requested.

He stroked his bearded chin, and began to speak in a very slow, quiet cadence. “I see a woman... and I see a commitment. I see faith, a deep, cultural faith. I see nature and evolution. A commitment to an ideal or concept... (long pause)... so ornate, so abstract.” His voice trailed off.

After a few moments, he began again. “To complete a circle. So deep, one makes a commitment... to reach a stage of understanding. A ritual that is so engrained that the abstraction is necessary so that the living can make some sort of meaning. The Soul... when the body dies, the Soul... (long pause).” I sat and re-read his cryptic catch phrases I had jotted down, as the tape rolled on. I waited for him to speak. “It is an abstract expression of nature”, he continued. “There is the “literal” and there is the “abstraction”, which is not literal. There is a layering... but how far from Nature? This is the “act of building”; building a ‘hidden’ meaning through abstracted detail.”

Sam had been to India, so I figured he knew about some of the details of the cremation process. I did not recall having said a word about the photograph. Somehow he understood it was by the Ganges River, although there was nothing in the shot to actually suggest such a thing. “Location by a sacred river... preparing and placing the body, this is very abstract! Abstract as different”, he repeated. “Beautiful, rich, and wonderful. If we didn’t have ritual, it would... (long pause).” He was deep in thought. Sam continued, “Such a ritual serves as a function. It functions to allow or engage, to wonder about (one’s) purpose in life. Something to strive for, and a way to keep people “in line”, because there are formal and informal sanctions.”

“Ritual takes into consideration social norms and mores. Like the orderly stacking of the cordwood that I see in your photograph, there is order to this process that must be assimilated... (long pause). This order can be two forces. First, on one level there is the oppressive type of order, like capitalism run amuck. Then there is a natural order... which is nature-based and ordered through culture. Class structure based on capitalism, for instance,

is an order of oppression leading to decadence... an order that leads to decay. Las Vegas, as an example. This type of perception fetters and skews, and is unlike the Buddhist perception (Pali: *Sannakkhandha*). One must have *experience* in order to make a choice. It's part of the 'big balance'."

"Such a ritual as this could free the Mind. It is the paradigm of perception. It is a way of "co-experiencing". Experiencing your environment and experiencing your nature. As observer, during the death experience such as this, one could choose to "keep his eyes closed" to that experience. To refuse to think outside those realms. To refuse to think 'out of the box' at a spiritual level. But what if... what if at that moment, that abstraction, itself, could bind (*yug* (yoke), *yoga*) us to an act... to an 'ideal'... toward an end to semiotics?"

I felt he had hit a keynote. The end of semiotics formed the cornerstone of Buddhist thought. Sam 's gaze was fixed on the photograph.

"We could also look at this as a three dimensional object-- as something that changes for a situation or changes as needed, or this could be part of one small, organic part of a larger – kind of a duel (macro and micro) applicability."

"Constant motion. It never remains the same and that's so much of the misconceptions that we have. A number of cultures especially the American culture, American society. So my concept with the fourth dimension, not so much that it's another view, only that it's constantly moving, constantly in a state of change. To me that is more or less the fourth dimension. We Westerners take a snapshot of it and put it in a biology book and it's as you see it.... its not that tangible. This photograph is a freeze-frame, but what we

need to remember – and that’s my point, a lot of Westerners would look at it as this thing that’s frozen in time. I look at this as fluid and moving because where that person ‘went’ changed dramatically and that person has changed now and just as dramatically that energy that I’m talking about is transference of energy. Even here inside this picture, there are ashes.... dust and ashes from other funerals. Obviously, it’s a funeral ‘parlor’ that’s going somewhere else. So within that picture it shows a change. It shows... structure, in its various stages, in one picture. So the picture does show change, when you stop and look at it. In so much of the western culture, this would be the end of something and the... transition. It’s not a huge transition; it’s just a transition of energy. That’s just the step to energy. It’s just like us getting up in the morning.

“I would analyze it holistically.... like it explains everything else. This picture is two dimensional, but through intellectual thought and discussion, this two-dimensional object brings meaning to what’s discussed with that picture, metaphorically. I believe that everything is in motion and that No Thing doesn’t change. The world is constantly in motion. You have to analyze beyond two-dimensionality. We’re also constantly synthesizing... evaluating. I have to start with the analysis piece before I can begin synthesizing. My experiences *are* the evaluation process.”

I asked if Buddhist semiotics would enter into this perceptual process?

Sam: Absolutely. They are honoring that personal change and that’s a good thing. That’s something (about which) our culture is very reactionary. They don’t value change the way most Buddhist cultures do. To me this is life and talk about lived experiences. I looked

at those experiences again in terms of energies and this reminds me of many cycles I've seen in my life where people change or where situations change. But people pass on or people transition their energy into a different direction... its impact on others and its impact on me. I can understand and accept these changes we talked about before as a part of life. My mom is gone and that is painful, but the pain helped me realize (an) experience that's natural. Now, to be able to live through that change. The only logical explanation I can come up with is that I have to accept this change. I have no choice but to celebrate in that matter.

“Further, I think that my experience in Thailand and my time on that Buddhist journey is part of a perception that's kind of foreign from my experiences as just a human being. But then there's the spiritual side, which was religious, and how I was raised a Christian most of my life. Buddhism really changed my perceptions of the world. Buddhism allows that marriage to happen. I think of Buddha in terms of nature too, that Buddhism is nature because I think that's natural coexistence. A religion or spiritual belief isn't frozen in time. Change must occur in order for that (semiotic) abstraction to exist.”

I thumbed back through my notes, for one of Sam's phrases. I read aloud to him “a commitment to an abstraction,” then commented, “I didn't fully *get* it, and I'd like you to explain more about that.”

Sam's reply was that, “Death is a natural process and religion has made an event, like the death of the body, as an abstraction. It's a part of religion removing through abstractions – pass away from nature, but changing that into....perceptions. And these people who bury themselves and burn themselves and save each other, whatever that religious abstraction is,

they're very, very committed to that and, to me, this is the ultimate commitment... Death. It's all about your necro-destination. And this is their idea of their necro-destination. That's why they're so committed to doing what they're doing. They're so committed that it's part of their social norms, and their family makes sure that it happens. It's written down and legally documented in some cultures, etc. What can possibly happen.... than to believe in the after life? That's the deepest part of ideology. It's as deep as it can possibly go. This is the deepest commitment that somebody could make is.... their body in their afterlife. That's abstraction.

SAM'S STORY: AN ANALYSIS

Buddhism: Separating Fact from Fiction

Of all the major religions in the world, Buddhism may well be the most misunderstood by westernized societies. Buddhism, in fact, can hardly be justifiably referred to as a religion at all. It lacks all of the major components of what generally constitutes 'religion'. Its founder (who was never called Buddha in his lifetime) was neither a God nor an agent of god. He was described as "fully human". There is no Supreme Being at all in Buddhism. There is no Soul to torture or rescue. There is no heaven to ascend to and there is no hell in which to languish. At the time of his death, there was no written record of his teachings, therefore any dogmatic rules and regulations to fail to adhere to. There are no absolute codes of conduct to "forsake". No one has ever been "saved" through coercion. Not one drop of blood has ever been spilled in any attempt to force acceptance of a foreign

doctrine against one's will. There are no articles of faith, save one... one's faith in one's self. Even *that* notion is modified because ultimately, there is no Self.

There *are* life-style guidelines suggested by Buddha, but he was willing to break them if it meant refraining from causing harm to another. A case in point would be his decision to eat pork in his eightieth and final year of life. Abstinence from eating meat was thought to keep the body more receptive to meditation techniques, a mainstay of Buddhist life. Rather than turn down a poor man's offering, he ate a gift of rancid food. It resulted in Buddha's *Para nirvana*, but before he died he sent a courier to make sure the peasant did not blame himself for Buddha's death. Such is the key component of Buddhism... unconditional compassion for all sentient beings.

Sam is a practicing Buddhist. This means that he sits in *vipasana*, seated meditation. He does not look for support or guidance from a detached Super Alien in the sky. He sits and pays attention to the breath entering and leaving his nose. It is *that* simple, and yet so complex. There are no lofty platitudes to aspire to in meditation. In fact it is considered counter-productive to chase after mental formations that constantly arise from the subconscious to the conscious mind. One gently returns to witness one's breath. This act is called *pranayama*, meaning "energy-in-out".

Sam has not turned his back on his Christian roots. Through early, seminal Christian teachings, he has dedicated his life to helping young people educate themselves. But he *has* renounced contemporary neo-Christian ideals of cruelty, hatred, intolerance, violence, and psychological coercion. Without constantly talking about it, he allows the words of Jesus to guide his daily activities. For this reason, I refer to this section as a study in cross-cultural

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forms of perception. Perception, in Buddhism is one of the twelve aspects of what is called the chain of Dependent Co-origination. This concept will be addressed in more detail later.

The *Encyclopedia of Semiotics* is a comprehensive account of development in the study of sign and symbol. The field of semiotics can, for me, quickly reach dizzying heights. These intellectual gymnastics are apparently also capable of baffling some of our world's greatest thinkers. I've heard it described as the study of "how and if we know we know what we know." Buddhism, for many scholars, represents the crown jewel of semiotic analysis. In fact, the *Encyclopedia of Semiotics* refers to Buddhism as the *end* of semiosis (Rambelli in Bouissac, 1998, p. 97). Sam, as noted earlier, has come to the same conclusion.

Linguistics as a Semiotic Tool

Much of Buddhism's theoretical reflection centers on the relationship of thought and language with various forms of consciousness. Buddhist phenomenologies state that language is not a constituted entity of reality (*dharma*), but rather three dharmas (phonemes, words, and sentences) (Rambelli, p. 93). These linguistic dharmas are neither identical with material entities, nor 'pure consciousness' (Mind), nor mental factors (which are considered affective and intentional states) (Rambelli, p. 93). Thought-activity is considered a manipulation of syllables or phonemes into word combinations, which form the base-structures of language (Rambelli, p. 93). "For this reason, linguistic dharmas belong to a group of ordinary language endowed with meaning" (Rambelli, p. 93).

Language is thought of as the main tool for articulating phenomenal reality and represents the fourth ring in the Buddhist chain of conditioned causation (*pratitya-*

samutpada) collectively referred to as name-forms (*nama-rupa*). These name-forms represent the interdependence of thought processes and external reality, phenomena with “discriminating mind”, and things found in the “ordinary world of suffering” (Rambelli, p. 93). I should note that ‘suffering’ is a poor translation of *dukkha*, which has no English equivalent.

For the Buddhist, linguistic descriptions do not represent absolute truth because language is an “instrument of fallacious knowledge” (Rambelli, p. 94). Perception, which is a reality constructed from ordinary states of consciousness, is born of conceptualization, which is constructed from perceptual data and their subsequent semantic articulation (Rambelli, p. 94). I should note that these perceptions are considered an “illusion” by the radical constructivist linguists associated with later Buddhist thought (Yogacara School), which has always seemed to me to introduce elements of Hinduism back into Mahayana Buddhist semiotics. Using the word “illusion” to refer to ordinary states of consciousness is quintessential Hindu semantics.

Instead, Murti (1955) prefers to place phenomenologically-based perceptions under the blanket concept of *avidya* (ignorance), which emphasizes that non-enlightened people consider their ‘image of the world’ to be representative of an exacting reality, which confuses ontology with epistemology. An individual’s reliance on the coupling of mental images with linguistic description is considered a root cause of *dukkha* (suffering). If the individual continues to suppose that her / his reality is the only reality, *dukkha* continues unabated. Obviously, this notion runs counter to western forms of Cartesian essentialism. So, if the Postmodernists believe they somehow invented ‘cognitive relativism’, they are

2,500 years too late.

Sam said that the funeral pyre scene could be viewed on different planes of cognitive insight. One could become wrapped up in the denser, molecular reality and become attached to that particular experience. The viewer could remain confined to the ritual itself. He also noted that the viewer could cut through the external semiotic iconography to achieve an understanding beyond ordinary consciousness. His difficulty in finding words to express this notion hinted at the inherent limitations of language.

Nagarjuna (c. 150-250 C.E.) codified this linguistic philosophy. Ordinary language fell into four groups: words that are (1) related to superficial aspects of phenomena; (2) uttered in dreams; (3) conditioned by fallacious attachment to wrong ideas; and (4) forever conditioned by the seeds (*bija*) of dukkha (Rambelli, p. 94). These semiotic “seeds”, incidentally, lie dormant in the unconscious until they “ripen” and rise to the subconscious, then conscious level. I speculate that they can be related to Jung’s concept of the primal, archetypal semiotic process, which I will explore later in this dissertation.

Nagarjuna’s work in this area found roots in Buddhism as the philosophy flourished, spread, and became subject to interpretation by subsequent scholars. Nagarjuna’s first sanction of ineffability (that communication through language was impossible) was “aimed at the attainment of emptiness through an incessant deconstruction of meaning” (Grapard, 1987, p. 211-234). Up to this point, I believe Nagarjuna’s system is consistent with Buddha’s teachings. However, it did open the door for speculation that even the Buddha’s teachings were suspect. As Buddhism continued to evolve, schools of thought emerged that questioned Buddha’s transmission of knowledge through linguistic means. One train of

thought refers to the language of Buddha as *upaya* (mere skillful means), by which he used as an “expedient void of absolute value” to express a doctrine to groups whose intellectual capacity was below that of succeeding generations. The “profoundest teachings” were transmitted by a “twilight language” or “intentional language” (*samdhabhasa* or *samdhyabhasa*), “comprehensible only to those endowed with superior faculties” (Rambelli, p. 94).

In sum, Rambelli (p.97) puts it this way,

“Once the human cognitive apparatus has been transformed into the supreme, mirror like wisdom, semiosis (as the activity of creation, interpretation, and transmission of signs) is brought to an end by the attainment of emptiness. What remains is only the reiteration of cosmic processes and the reflection of the absolute and undifferentiated realm of essence performed through yoga. Buddhist texts describe this condition that defies human possibilities of comprehension through the metaphor of Indra’s net: each pearl reflects all the other pearls without interpreting or modifying them. The Buddhist universe in its

absolute modality is made of reflections reflecting reflections

in a cosmic interplay of pure light.”

Iconography and the Mechanics of Perception

“Do not be led by reports, or tradition, or hearsay. Be not led by the authority of religious texts, nor by mere logic or inference, nor by considering appearances, nor by the delight in speculative opinions,” said the Buddha. “One is one’s own refuge, who else could be the refuge?” (Dhammapada, XII, 4). With these words came a break with classical Hinduism, Buddha’s native religion. The first recorded instance of radical, iconoclastic existentialism was born. “The teaching of the Buddha is qualified as *ehi-passika*, inviting one to “come and see”, but not to come and believe. “It is always seeing through knowledge or wisdom (*nana-dassana*), and not believing through faith” (Rahula, 1959, p. 9). Likewise, Buddha showed no interest in speculating on metaphysical questions, dismissing such activities as wandering in a “wilderness of opinions” (Rahula, 1959, p. 9).

For Sam, using the image of the funeral pyre to speculate on the nature or non-nature of the Soul, transmigration or termination of Being, the existence or non-existence of life after death, or other such riddles is superfluous to the task at hand. As indicated in our conversation, he focused on the subject of change, or *viparinamma-dukkha*. “Change” is usually described, in Buddhist terminology, as “impermanence” (*anicca dukkha viparinamadhamma*) and is one of the three major conditions of dukkha. These conditions of dukkha are viewed from three aspects: 1.) dukkha as ordinary suffering, (2) dukkha as produced by change, and (3) dukkha as conditioned states.

Buddhists recognize that “all composite things are subject to change.” This understanding is so vital to Buddhist thought, that these were the last words spoken by the Buddha before his death, as he sat cross-legged with his assembled students. What westerners conceive of as “being”, or the “individual”, or “I” is, for the Buddhist, only a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces or energies, which are divided into five aggregates (*pancakkhandha*).

The first aggregate is the Aggregate of Matter, which include the “Four Great Elements”: solidity, fluidity, heat, and motion. These elements are associated with our five material sense organs: eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. Sense organs correspond to objects in the external world, namely visible form, sound, odor, taste, and tangible things. Interestingly, included in this list of sense organs is “mind”. Ideas or conceptions, which are in the sphere of mind-objects (*dharmayatana*), both internal and external, fall within the realm of the Aggregate of Matter (Rahula, p.21).

Sense organs allow for the Aggregate of Sensations, which provide contact of physical or mental organs with the external world. Through this contact, the Third Aggregate, Perceptions (*sannakkhandha*), allow for the recognition of objects, whether physical or mental (Rahula, p.21). It should be noted that when the eye, for instance, comes in contact with the color ‘blue’, visual consciousness is awareness of the presence of color, but it does not recognize that it is blue. There is no recognition at this particular stage. Rahula states that, “the term ‘visual consciousness’ is a philosophical expression denoting the same idea as is conveyed by the ordinary word ‘seeing’. Seeing does not mean recognizing. So are the other forms of consciousness” (Rahula, p.21).

The Fifth Aggregate, that of Consciousness, is a reaction or response, which has at least one of the sense organs attached to it. Mental consciousness (*mano-vinnana*) has the mind (*manas*) as its basis and an idea or thought as its object. “It should be repeated that according to Buddhist philosophy, there is no permanent, unchanging spirit which can be considered Self, Soul, or Ego, as opposed to matter, and that consciousness should not be taken as ‘spirit’ as opposed to matter,” states Rahula (p. 23). Attachment to transitory thought processes, born of the senses, is a root cause of dukkha. Just as we are neither the same person we were as an infant, nor different from that person, we are not the thoughts that are in a flux of momentary arising and disappearing.

As one thought fades, another seed (*bija*) of consciousness arises from the subconscious to take its place. “One thing disappears, conditioning the appearance of the next, in a series of cause and effect” (Rahula, p. 26). In Buddhism, there is no unmoving mover behind the movement. It is simply movement.... change. “There is no thinker behind the thought. Thought itself is the thinker. Remove the thought and there is no thinker to be found,” notes Rahula (p. 26).

This notion is diametrically opposed to the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*: I think, therefore I am. In my estimation, this is perhaps the most difficult concept for westerners to embrace. The western mind-set is built on the dependence of the mind in order to construct a basis for action. The cultivation of the rational intellect is the very thing individuals attach their whole “essence” to. The western thinker will fight tooth and nail to remain attached to the Aggregate of the Senses. This is the slippery slope on which he builds his intellectual fortress. This is the justification for his defense and the vehicle for his sustained attachment

to *dukkha*, and all the suffering that ensues.

If there is any one passage in this dissertation worth noting, it is my preceding comments. Here is where the Buddhist and Neo-Christian ideologies part ways. This conflict explains where the Essentialists find their rationale for their philosophic underpinnings, and in some cases, where the Relativists build their counter-point. This conundrum was not lost on Sam (as a Buddhist practitioner), nor on me (as an interested, “student bystander” of the philosophy). We viewed my photograph, and as we examined it we used the *dharma* of linguistics to try to express our sense perceptions.

CHAPTER FOUR:

CARMEN’S STORY: AN EMOTIVE RESPONSE

Carmen is a tall, slender, striking woman with black, curly hair and penetrating, dark brown eyes. She is a very intense and highly articulate intellectual. Well educated, she was awarded her Master’s degree from Stanford and her Ph.D. from the University of Arizona. She is potentially intimidating to strangers, but to those who know her, she is very personable and engaging. She has no time for small talk and prefers an extremely direct approach to any subject at hand. Her manner of speech is deliberate, focused and often extremely serious, but she punctuates her thoughts with terrific outbursts of laughter. Her complexity and breadth of knowledge made her an outstanding choice as participant for my data collection.

“I was a tall, dark, lanky youth,” she began. “I am certifiably brown and authentically ‘the Other’. My mother is Afro / Cuban. She immigrated to the United States
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from Cuba, and worked as a nanny. My father was an East Los Angeles Hispanic, who drifted in and out of my life before being murdered, along with my aunt and uncle. My childhood was gestated in grief.”

“My mother is a devout Catholic, and Catholicism played a major role in my early development. At one point, I was shipped off to a Catholic boarding school..... a convent, where I was tortured with scripture. I was not ‘present emotionally’ at that time..... in fact, I was practically dead. My Father, ‘rescued’ me (not really), and renamed me. “You must disassociate yourself from your Mother,” he told me.”

“Shortly thereafter, he was killed and my Mother re-entered the picture. I was renamed again. Psychotherapy served as tutorial for me, until I could reach a place where I could once again return as the child on my mother’s lap. My mother also learned to ‘contain’ her grief and let it be. However my early life experiences were steeped in ‘historical grief,’ as I have absorbed the lines of my ancestry..... the Slave ships, the death, the desperation of needing rescuing, and the relationship between perpetrator and victim. Form before form,” she continued, “every point on the wheel. I wore my Catholicism as a *veneer*.”

Her eyes were glassy as she spoke, but as always, I saw no tears. Carmen was never one to feel self-pity, or exact revenge through rage. Her journey through the twists and turns of her childhood helped hone her sharp wit and even sharper intellect. At once possessing the street smarts of a Hispanic, Los Angelina from the city, as well as the refinement of an advanced scholar, Carmen “held her own” any time she engaged in frank discourse. Her embedded memory of historical grief bubbled to the surface as she made numerous

associations through the photograph, but never without a sense of gratitude for having successfully plumbed the depths of her sorrow. At one point, Carmen brought me several photographs of herself as a young girl. One in particular caught my eye. Carmen quietly identified the photo as, “the saddest little girl in the world.” I looked at the limpid, watery eyes of the child in the photo, and agreed with her assessment. It was as if one could actually feel the futile attempt by the girl to force a smile for the photographer. Upon closer study, the face in the photograph embodied the trauma of a youngster shuffled from parent to parent, to convent, back to parent, until finally her childhood transitioned into youthful adolescence. Carmen continued:

“Later, I deemed that I take responsibility..... that I take that obsidian knife, that Tongue of the Sun, and that I take responsibility for wielding that knife. The relationship between captor and captive, and the power of all that blood which has run. It has spilled over into the next level of evolution, and is bigger than my “*persona*”.” Again, Carmen touched on the overriding weight of cultural and historical happenstance, which she indicated washed over entire populations of subjugated people from one generation to the next. In this case, Carmen drew a parallel between her own “coming of age” and the personal responsibility that attached itself to her challenges.

Carmen drew upon her connection to Mayan symbolism when she referred to the obsidian knife. The relationship between the sacrificial blade and its capacity to “cut through” illusion or self-doubt was not lost on me. Carmen used the metaphor of the razor-sharp blade to allude to the tempering of one’s personality in order to stiffen one’s resolve.

Carmen then began to discuss her current situation. “I was born into the lowest class
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level, and now I perceive myself as wealthy, although I know I am really middle-class. I am heterosexual, but I also love a woman's body, and in this regard I am vicarious of the intimate type. I have a hybrid understand of religious philosophy, and have borrowed from a variety of belief systems. I relate to Buddhism and Taoism, and follow the teachings of Sai Baba (Hindu guru and mystic). I identify with the Cuban Santeria. I don't know much about Islam, and I can't make any identification with fundamentalism. I am Yaqui, and I identify strongly with the teachings of Juan Matus and his Yaqui Way of Knowledge."

I handed Carmen the photograph of the funeral pyre. Carmen took a long look, and then gave a literal description of what she was seeing. As with Sam, Carmen had a pretty fair idea of the "who, what, and where" behind the image. By now, she knew the drill, so I let her sit and contemplate, while I turned on the tape recorder and settled into the sofa in preparation to take notes.

"I believe it is a woman. I don't know why..." she began. "HMMMMMMMM", she quietly uttered, "to fight the impeccable fight. Only a warrior can be a (wo)man of Knowledge." She was quoting Juan Matus, a Yaqui sorcerer. "To balance the terror with wonder," she continued, again quoting the medicine man. Her brow was furrowed as she drew close to the photo, inhaled deeply, and then blew her breath out in a long slow hum. She sat in silence for quite some time before she began again to speak.

"I can live *through* this symbol, *through* this icon. I see the Wheel of Life. Through this picture I can see (the relationship) of elation versus phobia. It offers a resting place. It is a picture of a carefully shrouded individual. I see (this issue of) care, in relationship with my own impending demise, that I, too, may someday be that offering. In this photo, I see the

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imminent digestion of the body by flame. Composting. Digestion. Being in the compost condition. “Where were you going?” she asked the woman in the photograph, rhetorically. “I see the act of Being, the act of Becoming. This endless cycle, distilled through the process of digestion..... this endless cycle.”

I figured she was making reference to alchemy. With her hybrid spirituality, Carmen was often likely to switch “codes” at a moment’s notice. I needed to keep alert and flexible if I was to remain attuned to her responses, for Carmen was often mixing Caribbean folk beliefs with orthodox Hinduism, or Yaqui sorcery with Catholicism. In this case, I felt that Carmen was actually placing herself in the position of the deceased woman, and forming a relationship of empathetic solidarity. She spoke as if she were experiencing the immolation process for herself.

“I sense compassion. A returning to the ‘primordial’ ooze. I am fetal jelly,” she said.

A sense of peace came over Carmen’s face. It was as though the deceased woman’s trials and tribulations had been lifted from her corpse, through Carmen’s journey *into* the photograph. Through reciprocity, perhaps a portion of Carmen’s burden was lifted as well. She seemed lighter and more relaxed after her prolonged and intense study of the imagery. We moved from her study to a couple of chairs placed under a large cedar tree in her rather expansive backyard. Further up the trail, I could make out the shape of a large teepee, which her family used for sweats and other rituals. Birds flitted from branch to branch throughout the grove of junipers and oak brush. During our meetings, Carmen would often suggest a change of scenery from time to time. There seemed to be a certain degree of importance in

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the choosing of our environment during each data collection session. After a few minutes of enjoying the sunshine, Carmen returned to the subject at hand.

“In the afterlife, there is my hope to maintain consciousness without a body. I would hope to make a bitchin’ transition, to embody the disembodiment, if you will, with intention and courageousness. Through the alchemical, crucible process... Apache Death Dancer”, she added. I had noticed Carmen had the sculptures of three figurines in her house. They were her Apache Death Dancers. The sculptures are quite interesting, as they appear to be made by folk artists. There was nothing polished or sophisticated about them, yet they were quite charming just the same. Later, when we returned indoors, Carmen took one of them off of her mantle and brought it for me to examine more closely. I found myself wondering if the Apache Death Dancers perform their celebrations until the dancer attains an altered state of consciousness, as in Sufi dancing. Perhaps a celebration of life through the act of honoring death, I surmised.

Carmen often used alternative semiotic means to convey her understandings. Precise use of words has been one of Carmen’s rules of thumb, but she often tried to find imagery to share with me during our conversations. It was common for Carmen to remove a painting from the wall to assist her in her attempts to convey a concept. Over the course of our meetings, Carmen handed me paintings, drawings, books with marked passages, sheets of paper with the names of authors on a variety of subjects, family photographs, and other such artifacts. She was using every means possible to form a bridge between us that might transcend normal speech. “This concept of an Afterlife and Consciousness, I do not want to limit any possibility through the certainty of language”, she said. “To embody the Endless

Possibility... possibility as a noun. The act of “making do”... distilled through this process of digestion. Primordial ground... the Soul. It may also be our function to give information to Primordial Ground.”

I sensed that we had come to a fitting end for this particular journey, and with the sun setting on the San Juan mountains, I prepared to drive back to New Mexico to my home on the Navajo Reservation. I gathered my tape recording equipment, my bag, pencils, notes, and other sundry tools of the trade, and bid Carmen adieu. As I drove home, I wondered aloud about her cryptic comments about returning to Primordial Ground. Could the funeral pyre symbolize a physical, sacred ground for the (re)enactment of the symbolic ground to which we all must return? I felt a slight spasm in my neck and shoulder, which caused me to shudder slightly as if I caught a chill.

At that very moment, I recalled Don Juan Matus’ teachings that Death stalks every one of us over our left shoulder. He was unflinching in his assurance that such a phenomenon serves us well as a constant reminder of our own mortality.

CARMEN’S STORY: AN ANALYSIS

Photo Image Theory: A Jungian Perspective

Like Sam, Carmen had invested much of herself in my study. During each session, it did not take long for Carmen to immerse herself in the task of deciphering the importance of the photographic imagery. Her style of speech-delivery was concise and penetrating. Once seated and comfortable, Carmen used the photograph as a cue, in order to “trigger” associations derived from her childhood. The imagery in the photo became metaphoric in

nature, allowing subliminal thought patterns to rise to a conscious level and become actualized through her voice.

In speech, we tend to organize our thoughts in what we hope will appear as logical order. However, “our apparently disciplined waking life is by no means as precise as we would like to believe” (Jung, 1964, p. 27). Carmen was aware of this, and allowed herself to weave in and out of both intellectual and emotive responses, as well as ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’, psychic associations. Although her speech is well articulated, she has strongly indicated an ability to delve into the historical connections that lie just beneath the surface of her conscious thoughts. Jung states that these “historical associations are (the result of) the rational world of consciousness and the world of instinct” (Jung, p. 33). Rather than suppress her “historical grief”, she chose to embrace it, however painful. In doing so, she took the pyre as an icon (in Jungian terms a “motif”) with which she made noteworthy associations. Whereas a sign is “always less than the concept it represents, the symbol always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning” (Jung, p. 41). Jung notes that these symbols can appear in a variety of “psychic manifestations” and present themselves as thoughts, feelings, acts, and situations (Jung, p. 44). It appeared to me that she allowed her subconscious to interface with her conscious thoughts, using other iconographic symbols, which served to express her thoughts when conventional words would not suffice.

Photo Image Theory: Archetypes and Intuition

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Floating in and out of conventional thought forms allowed her to touch on what Jung as called ‘archetypes’. These archetypes are thought by Jung to be “collective in their nature and origin” (Jung, p. 41), manifesting themselves as “representations” emanating from “primeval dreams and creative fantasies” (Jung, p. 42). Fantasies are not to be discounted as meaningless. Rather, “feeling as I mean it (like thinking) is a rational (i.e. ordering) function, whereas intuition is an irrational (i.e. perceiving) function” (Jung, p. 49). Western science largely discounts the ‘irrational’ thought forms, while Jungians believe them to be front and center to the re-integration of a healthy psyche. Intuition is one of the four functional types of consciousness indispensable to the road back to ultimate “individuation”. “These four functional types correspond to the obvious means by which consciousness obtains its orientation to experience..... and intuition tells you whence it (consciousness) comes and where it is going” (Jung, p. 49). On this subject, Jung is quick to point out that these four categories are by no means all-inclusive. Other “viewpoints” are will power, temperament, imagination, and memory, among many others. Additionally, these criteria are not dogmatic (Jung, p. 49.) Jung (p. 52) reminds the reader (or ethnographer!) that these intuitive responses to imagery are not to be analyzed exclusively through supplantation of the second party’s own psychic manifestations. “As a plant produces its flower, so the psyche creates its symbol” (Jung, p. 53).

Photo Image Theory and Archaic Remnants

Jung had a relatively brief, intense, and stormy relationship with Freud. Ultimately,

Jung was unwilling to relate psychic phenomena with sexual biology to the degree that Freud gave it credence. This rift, along with personality differences, led to their estrangement. Throughout, Jung fully agreed with Freud that levels of consciousness hearken back to “archaic remnants” (Jung, p. 57). These remnants, often manifesting themselves in a dream state, were “mental forms whose presence can not be explained by anything in the individual’s own life and seem to be aboriginal, innate, and inherited shapes of the human mind” (Jung, p. 57). Jung stated that these archetypes, or “primordial images” form the ‘basis for our mind,’ just as the overall structure of our body suggests a connection to previous mammalian forms (Jung, p. 57). He felt that these thought-forms link the dream-pictures of modern man with “collective imagery” of an “immensely old psyche” through outcroppings of mythological motifs (Jung, p. 57). As an example, I chose my funeral pyre photograph from over one thousand options, expecting that the icon would stir memories from different recesses in one’s mind, and on various levels of consciousness. The death-image itself is, of course, expressed in countless symbol systems throughout human history. Carmen drew parallels not only to her “historical grief” through the motif of the “slave ship”, but also as a “raft,” of sorts, in the transitional process of “crossing-over” to another mysterious form of consciousness. Rafts, chariots, ships and other such archetypal motifs seem to transcend cultural and historical boundaries in their collective representation of the death experience. Storytelling, from time immemorial is full of such archetypes. These archetypes are considered universal, but Jung again adds that one should not interpret them in dogmatic, ecclesiastical fashion (Jung, p. 69). “The fact is, in former times, (hu)mans did not reflect upon their symbols; they lived them and were unconsciously animated by their meaning” (Jung, p. 69).

Archetypes seem to appear on varying levels of consciousness. Depending on one's outlook, their presence is dismissed as superfluous to human experience, or relished for their power of agency in the healing process. Jung recognized these layers of consciousness. As participants in an age of skepticism, rational thinking has gained dominant legitimacy, while the irrational has collectively been deemed either irrelevant or debilitating. "Even physics, the strictest of all applied sciences, depends to an astonishing degree upon intuition, which works by way of the unconscious" (Jung, p. 82). "Routine responses may be practical and useful while one is dealing with the surface, but as soon as one gets in touch with vital problems, life itself takes over and even the most brilliant theoretical premises become ineffectual words" (Jung, p. 82).

Although we, as a civilization, seem to prefer to believe we are progressing toward our 'goal' through our alleged, heightened intellect, Jung seems doubtful. "In earlier ages, as instinctive concepts welled up in the mind of man, his conscious mind could no doubt integrate them into a coherent psychic pattern. But "civilized" man is no longer able to do this. His "advanced" consciousness has deprived itself of the means by which the auxiliary contributions of the instincts and the unconscious can be assimilated" (Jung, p. 84). "We have stripped all things of their mystery and numinosity; nothing is holy any longer" (Jung, p. 84).

Visualization and Separation

Carmen was "tortured by scripture". Even though her personal history was wrapped

tightly in the ideology of Catholicism, she found her experiences ultimately deeply debilitating. From all accounts, her mother had good intentions in mind when she sent her daughter to be saved by a savior. The prospects of being sequestered in a convent must have seemed like a safe haven for her troubled child. Life outside this 'safety zone' appeared dicey at best.

Jung paid close attention to what he referred to as the 'infantile' mind. "We speak of archetypes like the *anima* and *animus*, the wise man, the great mother, and so on. You can know all about the saints, sages, prophets, and other godly men, and all the great mothers of the world. But if they are mere images whose numinosity you have never experienced, it will be as if you are talking in a dream, for you will not know what you are talking about" (Jung, p. 88). Jung continued to emphasize that verbiage will lack authenticity, for the manner in which these words relate to the individual's lived-experience is "all important" (Jung, p. 88).

Jung took great stock in the processes of a child's consciousness. "What we call the unconscious has preserved characteristics that formed part of the original mind" (Jung, p. 88). The unconscious hearkens back to "old things from which the mind freed itself as it evolved-- illusions, fantasies, archaic thought-forms, fundamental instincts, and so on" (Jung, p. 88). If these naturally occurring functions are repressed through an exterior, ideological dogma without due examination, the "more they spread through the whole personality in the form of a neurosis" (Jung, p. 89). In many cases, the unconscious mind attempts to assimilate these images and their corresponding feelings into one's realm of awareness. If these 'compensatory' functions are not entirely successful, the child forms

blocks (“infantile memory gaps”) which, if not attended to, present impediments to psychic unity at the adult level (Jung, p. 89). “We do not realize the far-reaching complications of the infantile mind, that are based on its original identity with the prehistoric psyche” (Jung, p. 89). “That original mind is just as much present and still functioning in the child as the evolutionary stages of mankind are present in the embryonic body” (Jung, p. 89). The recovery of these images, as in the case of Carmen, “brings back a piece of life, missing for a long time, that gives purpose to and thus enriches life” (Jung, p. 89).

External Visualization: Jung’s Critique

Jung notes “salvation through Christ” refers to the individuation process through “an image of wholeness or Self” (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 113). This process is ritually dramatized through Catholic Mass, using symbolic material forms in which bread and wine symbolize the body of Christ. These rituals of dismemberment and consumption predate early Christian practices, and are still common in contemporary societies worldwide. Eating Christ’s “body and blood” not only “commemorates his sacrifice and death, but symbolizes his resurrection and transmutation into the immortal body of his Church” (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 113). Jung considered Christ as an archetype of Self, which represents “a wholeness of personality which surpasses and includes the ordinary man” (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 116). His archetypal image reflects a variety of motifs: shepherd, lamb, fish, fisherman, etc., which from a psychological point of view establishes Christ as the “original man” (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 116). The “mystery of the Eucharist transforms the soul of the empirical man, who is only a part of himself, into his

totality, symbolically expressed by Christ” (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 116).

Early Christian organizations found it extremely difficult and dangerous to practice their new doctrine. Attempts to bring their Faith above ground resulted in great public displays of unimaginable cruelty on the part of their oppressors. Continued attempts to organize led to the usurping of pagan mythologies, which included the usurping of existing archetypal imagery, which included the ‘borrowing’ of Heracles’ (Hercules) trials and tribulations. These ‘dangerous liaisons’ are chronicled in the cryptic symbolism of John in his series of letters to early Christian cults hiding along the eastern reaches of the Mediterranean Sea. Even the most fanatical of contemporary Biblical scholars discount any correlation between John’s correspondence and the prediction of the End Times, as championed through contemporary Neo-Christian fundamentalist folklore.

In early mystical Christianity, “Christ had represented a totality that even embraced the anima or shadow side of (hu)mankind. But the Church later developed an extremely one-sided image of Christ” (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 117). This archetypal imagery reflected the “Redeemer”, all goodness and light-- who reflects the perfectly good father” (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 117). By creating an “opposite shadow”, the Christ symbol lost it’s ‘wholeness’ in a psychological sense (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 117). One might ask how Carmen, as wounded child, could benefit from any attempt to reintegrate her psyche under the ‘impossible’ weight of such dichotomist goal-setting.

Visualization: The Alchemical Process

Sprinkled throughout my data collection is the notion of the alchemical process as a tool embedded in the compensatory component of reintegration. Carmen often uses the term *digestion* as a euphemism for this methodology. Likewise, Jung studied the history of alchemy as an important part of psychological rehabilitation.

Jung was instrumental in reviving the largely bypassed medieval art of alchemical study. He saw alchemy as a vehicle for his own personal attempts to unify the anima and animus within himself. He collected an entire library of material written on the subject of alchemy and then made his findings available to 20th century Europe. He focused on the relationship between alchemical symbolism and archetypal dream images (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 129).

Alchemy is called the “Hermetic art” after its most visible ‘founder’, Hermes Trismegistus. Alchemists experimented with physical substances used to transform base metals into gold. The preferred “agent” for this process became *lapis*, or the Philosopher’s stone. It is noted that this chemical process served more as a metaphor for the spiritual transformation of the practitioner, rather than the more mundane need to transform inanimate matter (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 130). Jung felt certain that this concept of transformation, in actuality, became an expression of the “shadow” in its compensatory relationship with Christianity (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 131). As indicated above, “Christianity’s one-sided dogma and inability to unite the opposites had alienated us from our natural roots in the unconscious” (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 129).

At the heart of the alchemists' philosophy was the lapis, which Jung came to believe represented not only the reintegrated alchemist himself, but with Christ (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 129). "In the Christ / Lapis / Alchemist equation they saw their goal not only as assisting God to redeem Man, but also to redeem God himself from matter. The one primarily in need of redemption was not man, but the deity sleeping in the darkness of matter" (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 132). Through this alchemical process, the initiate hoped to confront the terrors of their own consciousness, which would lead to a radical transformation. By projecting their consciousness into the "darkness of matter", the practitioner sought to illuminate and liberate matter, and thereby bring it to consciousness (Hyde and McGuinness, 1994, p. 132). In this manner, I believe Carmen 'projected' herself 'into' the deceased body in the funeral pyre photograph in order to extract her own consciousness from the limitations of molecular structure.

A Yaqui Way of Knowledge: Indigenous Alchemy

As noted in our dialogue, Carmen uses her own sociocultural and biological heritage to assist in her continual transformation process. Carmen is quick to give credit to Juan Matus for her current spiritual understandings. The story of Don Juan, a Yaqui Indian who lived in the Sonora desert of northern Mexico, is a spellbinding tale of an elderly, but hyper-extraordinarily 'fit' sorcerer who taught his apprentice, Carlos Castaneda, the Yaqui "way of Knowledge" (Castaneda, 1972). The author's writings almost immediately came under attack as fabrication by naysayers. Originally in the form of a Master's thesis (and therefore

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read by a handful of scholars), Castaneda's work later became accessible to the general public, which led to its popular consumption and resulting, inevitable degradation. Just as the words attributed to Christ ring true to those who are receptive (despite its probable, fictional elements), so do the writings of Castaneda resonate with Carmen and me as transformative pedagogy.

Yaqui sorcery is shrouded in mystery. Its practitioners perform a series of tasks designed to develop and hone key, psychic skills. Sorcerers can either be immersed in acts of benevolence or malevolence and can be likened to the Navajo "Skinwalker", although drawing such a parallel (on my part) may be open to closer scrutiny and rebuttal. Suffice it to say that the sorcerer's path is fraught with peril, and according to Don Juan, literally a matter of life and death. The main thrust of the sorcerer's apprenticeship is in the garnering of personal power in preparation for the moment of death. This moment is, as Carmen stated, both wondrous and terrifying in nature. Each sorcerer 'battles' naturally occurring, psychic forces in his / her journey toward self-actualization.

Apprenticeship entails a re-awakening of latent powers, which can only be acquired through a re-conditioning of the psychic state of each individual. Some of the 'tasks' involve the use of very powerful psychotropic plants: datura and peyote among them. Don Juan stressed that these medicinal plants are not the sole agent of transformation, but rather a tool to be used, then 'discarded' once the practitioner has successfully passed through each 'portal' leading to his new, heightened level of understanding. These ensuing battles are performed on a psychic plane, yet can result in serious physical harm to the participant. This physical harm is not within the scope of western medicine, but rather a bodily transformation

with a metaphysically related consequence.

Much of the apprentice's time is spent breaking down predictable patterns of compulsion, which only serve to reinforce one's weaknesses and vulnerability to acts of self-delusion. The sorcerer-in-training seeks guidance from his inner psychic powers, which lie dormant in the ordinary human. Each student is expected to perform acts, as would a 'true warrior'. These acts involve the cultivation of inner strength, which necessitates the abolishment of self-pity, self-importance, and transference of one's shortcomings onto others through external neurotic projections. This work is most definitely not designed for just anyone. Once committed to self-discovery, the 'student' is expected to fight the battle of her / his life, with the final stage of individuation resulting in an 'impeccable hunter / warrior'. The end result is that the warrior is fully prepared to meet his death (which is constantly hovering near his left shoulder) with fearless dignity. For purposes of this dissertation, suffice it to say that Carmen saw in the funeral pyre a deep connection to the ultimate responsibility taken by any '(wo)man of power'. She psychically digested the "warrior's last stand", which culminated in the dissolution of the body by heat and flame.

Photo Imagery and Iconographic Transfer

Carmen is able to draw symbolic parallels between various cultural mythologies. As she spoke of the pyre as icon, she was able to shift language from a Hindu perspective to Indigenous forms of understanding, and back again. At one point, Carmen made reference

to the relationship of the captor and captive, the perpetrator and the victim. She drew from her ancestry and, what was once literal and now, metaphoric “blood-culture” prayers.

At one time, the Aztec culture had adopted the Toltec language, myths, and legends. They blended these rites with their own and recorded them. When the Spanish invaded Central America in 1519, neighboring tribes who were outraged by Aztec practices of human sacrifice assisted in the Aztec’s demise. Even the Aztec emperor welcomed Cortez, mistaking him for the ancient Aztec king, Quetzalcoatl. The emperor joined in the onslaught, believing that Cortez was fulfilling ancient Toltecian prophecy and would save the Aztec Empire. In reality of course, the Spaniards butchered people, and dismantled much of their cultural artifacts. In a twist of fate, Spanish friars were both repulsed and fascinated by the Aztec’s bloody rituals, and recorded them in Spanish as well as Native dialects.

As the indigenous culture was assimilated into the growing Spanish culture (and vice versa), these legends of blood sacrifice were hybridized and codified. Some of the legends spilled into Incan and Mayan folklore as well. These stories of blood sacrifice, while not purely authentic, were detailed in 16th century Nahuatl manuscripts entitled the Chimalpopoca Codex (Rosenberg, 1994, p. 485). These Codices identify the major Toltec god, Quetzalcoatl with Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec god of the sun and war.

The Toltec / Aztec myths are somewhat unusual in that they recount how both humans and gods had to make sacrifices in order to preserve both the Indigenous culture as well as the Universe itself. ‘Human Beings’ in the first Four Worlds had been unwilling to perform these blood sacrifices and were severely punished. The present, Fifth World was

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preserved through obedience to Aztec law. In keeping with these laws, the Sun was able to remain in motion, rather than scorching the earth through inertia.

In order to appease the Sun God, a boy was chosen yearly to fulfill the necessary blood ritual. For the entire year, the boy was groomed as a living god and treated to the entire splendor that accompanied such notoriety. The five days preceding his sacrifice were filled with dancing and dining. He was married to four virgins, symbolically representing four goddesses. The day of his sacrifice, the boy would ascend to the altar, where he was bound. Priests then cut out his heart with an obsidian knife and presented the still-beating organ to the Sun God. A new boy was then chosen post haste, in preparation for the next auspicious astrological moment in time.

From this tradition comes Carmen's reference to the Tongue of the Sun, which became an obsidian knife during the sacrifice. Through cross-cultural relations, this myth spread to adjoining cultures through story telling. The actual recounting of this tale is said to be linguistically both beautiful and powerful, due to its original form as a poem. One can envision how Catholic priests could have related this sacrifice to the death of Jesus.

I believe Carmen uses the blood-sacrifice metaphor as an example of the alchemical process by which one transcends the human condition. Historical grief takes form in the semiotic iconography of slave ships and human bondage as psychic and physical incarceration. Ultimately, a sense of freedom through acceptance of the paradoxical union of opposing forces is her spiritual journey. In her case, judging from her childhood stories, metaphor and lived experience are closely related.

The symbolic importance of the obsidian knife finds expression in Indigenous cultures that lived in the geographic location in which Carmen resides. The Anasazi culture had contact with Central American indigenous populations, and extensive trade took place between these cultures. In Chaco Canyon, situated in the San Juan basin in northwestern New Mexico, a “Sun Dagger” was rediscovered in 1977 by a non-Indian archaeologist. Cajete (1994, p. 204) describes this find as “an extraordinarily environmentally-based metaphor of the essential perspective that has been achieved by Indigenous education.”

The Sun Dagger is a petroglyph comprised of the precise placing of three sandstone slabs against a concave, horizontal indentation facing the sun. On this slab are inscribed one large and one small spiral. The interplay of light and shadow marks the point at which the sun reaches its “noon” position during the Summer Solstice. At Winter Solstice, two noonday daggers of light frame the large spiral. There are nineteen notches etched into the slab, which reflect the nineteen-year Metonic cycle of the moon. This iconography represents the length of time required for the moon to recur at the same place on the same calendar date (Cajete (1994, p. 204).

The connection between the obsidian knife and the sun dagger are realized astrologically and astronomically, as well as physically and metaphysically. “It is a metaphor of the creative learning and honoring of relationship that is indicative of Indigenous education” (Cajete (1994, p. 206). These relationships “originate with inner experience as a center and radiate out through time and space, forming concentric rings of relationship to other experiences of learning” (Cajete (1994, p. 206).

“By tracing the concentric rings of relationship.... (one) comes full circle in their journey

through the orientations of Indigenous environmental understanding and expression” (Cajete (1994, p. 202). The Cosmos is the greater context within which an individual resides. Over time, the individual learns “to expand their vision of themselves, and that their lives are part of the story of creation and life” (Cajete (1994, p. 206). The symbolism behind the funeral pyre represents one point on this wheel of life.

CHAPTER FIVE:

JAY’S STORY: A VISCERAL RESPONSE

In order to “flesh out” my personal understanding of my photograph, I thought long and hard as to how to best express my response. I decided I would approach this segment of my project from several different angles. I settled on three methods: first, an account of the actual experience of taking the photograph through a narrative in short story form; secondly, for me to be interviewed by someone familiar with my work; and third, a self-analysis generated through the ‘lens’ of J. Krishnamurti, a philosopher through whom I mostly closely align my own beliefs.

The following is a short story I wrote that chronicles the events leading up to, and including, the day I took the photograph. It is my contention that, by including my eye witness account of the events leading up to actual snapping of the lens, I can best illustrate my involvement in the creation of the photograph:

Funeral: Photo Faux Pas

I was sitting in coach on the tarmac, waiting for the big blue and gold Lufthansa to taxi toward the runway. I was back in Frankfurt, after a two-week side trip to Florence. I had a fourteen-hour flight ahead of me *en route* to New Delhi, and the capacity crowd was chattering with anticipation.

While we waited for clearance, I pulled a pen from my fanny pack and began to jot down more notes in my journal. Before I had departed New Mexico, my advisor had explicitly asked me to identify, in writing, my objective for this journey. I now wrote down the words “To come full circle.” This notation was neither deep nor original, but accurate. I mumbled to myself, “trite but true,” as my internal monologue noted that, indeed, I was headed to India with a specific agenda in mind.

I was charged with the task of finally putting to rest a series of traumatic events that had helped misshape my adulthood. Now, it was almost three decades after my inaugural trip to India and the resulting collapse of my youthful marriage, which had culminated in the departure from central India by my wife and her new boyfriend. Back in 1972, that catastrophe had shocked me to my very core. In succeeding years, I had chronicled a few of those miserable experiences in a series of as-yet unpublished short stories, but I had never sought adequate professional help to exorcise the accompanying demons. This trip I was about to embark on was designed to finally put this nightmare to rest. I wanted desperately to return to Benares, the holy city of India, where devout Hindus hoped to be when they finally experienced their moment of death. Dying in Benares, it is believed, releases the Soul (*atman*) to an ultimate state of freedom (*moksha*). I hoped to “die” in the symbolic

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sense and reemerge as an integrated individual.

Following my wife's departure, I had sat for days watching bodies burn on the funeral pyres, as I grappled with my sanity. It seemed reasonable to me now that I retrace those events, relive those experiences on-site, and burn those memories on a psychic level, just as the bodies are incinerated as an ultimate expression of karmic cleansing.

The jumbo jet continued to sit in line, awaiting departure. I stared blankly out the window. My thoughts drifted back to when my wife, along with her new man, had climbed aboard a bus in the village of Khajarao. I remembered waving meekly to them, with my mind and body as weak as my level of self-esteem. I was reduced to a shell then, and to a certain degree, was a shell now. I felt compelled to rid myself of the monkey hissing and clawing at my back. Revisiting the scene of my collapse, I theorized, could be highly therapeutic.

When I finally came out of my daydream, I realized we must have been in the air for quite some time. I slipped out of my seat and worked my way back through the crowded aisles to the restroom. There was a long line of men wearing Sikh turbans. I joined them, while situating myself at the back of the line. When it was finally my turn to use the facilities, I stepped inside and witnessed the worst mess in aviation history. The floor was carpeted in soggy hand towels, and there were copious amounts of green nasal discharge in the sink. Urine was sprayed all over the walls, and evidently no one had thought to flush. I gingerly sidestepped most of the smeared feces, performed my duties, and returned to my seat.

After climbing over three men, I slunk back into my seat. I was feeling low and mean. “F-ing *great* start! We’re not even over Poland yet!” I muttered, in a huff, to no one in particular.

I had absolutely no premonition at that time that in fifteen hours I would be literally Shanghai’ed at four in the morning by a threesome of Delhi’s Black Market taxi drivers, held “hostage” for hours, and that I would ultimately contract a case of prickly heat and a case of festering bed-bug bites, simultaneously, before finally passing out from sleep-deprivation in some brothel-like flop house in the depths of the inner city, to the sound of babies crying. Lots of them.

I did, however, intuit that this was not going to be a pleasant, upcoming thirty-six hours. I had just noticed I had someone else’s body-waste embedded in my shoelaces, which served, I felt, as irrefutable evidence in support of my bleak prediction.

After a few days, the swelling from the bed bugs went down, and the oozing stopped. My arms and legs returned to their normal size. Hundreds of scabs were, in deed, a very welcome sight. I had switched to a cheap but serviceable hotel and had gotten several adequate nights’ sleep.

I was supposed to start taking my malaria pills in preparation for the jungles of Thailand, which was coming up in a few weeks. Once the drug was in my system, I experienced vivid, strange dreams and nightmares during each night’s broken sleep.

One evening at dusk, about two weeks after I had landed in Delhi, I took my nightly pill, and went to the rooftop of the hotel to look over the city. Without being fully conscious

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of my pattern, I had made a habit of working my way to whatever high position was available, in order to observe the throngs of pedestrians and the traffic gridlock below. I could look down at the other rooftops, and I realized just how many children were flying kites around the city. There were more kites than I could count. The sheer numbers were truly an oddity, which I noted in my journal.

I listened quite carefully as I could hear the conversations of families while they cooked their dinners on hibachis in the open-air porches attached to their apartment. Each apartment appeared jammed with bodies, mostly those of children. I swore they were speaking English, chattering away in a rapid-fire dialogue, at the top of their lungs. The conversation was punctuated with raucous banter and, of course, plenty of crying infants. I listened intently for quite some time, unable to quite make out what they were all talking about. Finally, I came to the realization that they were not speaking English at all, and that I was under the influence of the malaria pills. I shook my head, finished my tea, and returned to my room. I fell asleep to the hum of my rusty swamp cooler.

I dreamt that I was in a room with a long table. I was among the people seated at the table. The room was dim and foggy. My ex-wife walked into the room, looked around, and spotted me. “Jim?” she queried, with an incredulous look on her face. “Is that you?” she asked. I nodded affirmatively, saying nothing. She walked up to get a closer look at me. I could barely make out her face in the haze and darkness, but I knew it was really she.

“I am *so* sorry for everything I did. I want you to know that”, she said in a quiet voice. She seemed so sincere, that I forgave her immediately. She had a look of relief on her face. She thanked me, and left the room.

In the morning, I awoke and remembered the dream very clearly. I felt a tremendous sense of well-being and contentment. I got dressed and made my way down to the hotel lobby. I bade ‘good morning’ to the houseboys on duty, and stepped over two more of them who were asleep on the stone floor. They were dressed in rags and were barefoot. I opened up the double doors at the hotel’s dilapidated entrance, and was hit with a blast furnace of heat from Delhi’s summer morning. I winced in the brightness of daylight and stepped into the streets.

As a bevy of beggars tugged at my sleeve, I made my way to a tea-vendor several blocks from my guesthouse. As I walked, I thought about the dream. I knew in my heart of hearts that my wife would have never made such an admission in “real life.” I knew that it was my subconscious, and that my psyche was somehow forgiving itself. But, although I understood this to be a fallacy, I still somehow was able to completely shed the baggage that I had wanted to discard.

I almost laughed out loud, as I realized that if this were the script for a Hollywood B-movie, it would have been rejected without a doubt. Corny and predicable, this plot! And yet, I felt like a brand new person. I hadn’t even made it to Benares yet, and the realization of my original intention of “coming full circle” had been fully met, malaria be damned. Corny or not, an epiphany had occurred.

A few hours later, soaked with sweat and tired from my walk, I returned to my guesthouse. With the assistance of the clerk behind the check-in desk, I booked a train ride from Delhi to Benares. Traveling by train is always very difficult. My days of traveling third class purely “for the adventure” were long over. I was in my fifties now, and was just

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looking to survive the ordeal. First class accommodations, with a sleeper, in no way assured a passenger of receiving any accommodations at all, receipt or no receipt.

When I boarded the correct passenger car, a man was asleep in my luggage rack, and two were asleep in my bed. “F-ing great!” I muttered to myself, while folding myself, Origami-style, into the fetal position on the metal floor. “Just f-ing great,” I repeated. I had to admit to myself that I loved India dearly, even if the guy who stole my seat *was* passing gas inches away from my face. I lacked sufficient headspace to turn away from the stench. I had someone’s beat-up luggage wedged in my left cheekbone, and someone else’s knee or ankle buried in my right temple. There were twenty-two people in our sleeper-car. The compartment was designed to hold four. Shattered windows were welded shut, so fresh air was no longer an option. Worse yet, Benares was situated sixteen hours down the track. Sleep was impossible, so I passively listened to the hypnotic, staccato rhythm of steel wheels on train tracks. This was India, and I accepted my situation, knowing I could have easily chosen to fly high above the fray.

I arrived in Benares’ older of two train stations in the dark. I flagged down a tuk-tuk driver, indicating to him that I wanted to go over the bridge to Old Town. He nodded and gestured that I step into the canopied motorcycle. Three naked ascetics climbed aboard as well. They didn’t have to pay, as it was customary to allow wandering monks a ride *gratis*, in honor of Buddha who, 2,500 years ago, had levitated across the Ganges River at the very same place.

Together, we four (I was the clothed one) entered this ancient site, the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. I paid the driver and he sped off, as they motioned

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for me to join them in some corpse-gazing meditation down by the River, but this time I respectfully declined. After a few unsuccessful attempts at securing lodging, I settled into a modest guesthouse matching my budget-requirements. Regardless of the price, virtually all Indian hotel rooms must be shared with mice, and more than an occasional rat. Given enough time, most travelers usually get used to this proposition, realizing that those were, in deed, *not mints* left on one's pillow.

The following morning, I awoke before dawn, untied my camera strap from my ankle (theft prevention), washed my face with brackish water coming out of a corroded pipe in my bathroom, and stepped out into the winding, narrow streets. Most streets in Benares are only wide enough to accommodate an ox-cart—testimony to its prehistoric origin. Modern vehicles are unable to navigate the labyrinth of cobblestone passageways. Instead, protected Brahma cattle wandered aimlessly throughout the city and pedestrians learned to deftly sidestep their calling cards.

It was down one of these little avenues that I spied a corpse being carried through the alleyways by a group of pallbearers. I tagged along, keeping a discreet distance. They carried the body on a litter held high above their heads. I could see the corpse's covered head wagging to the beat of the entourage's gait.

After a mile or so, they stopped for a cigarette break. They put the litter down on the side of the muddy road. I approached the group, and asked if I could join their procession. They were excited to have a foreigner join the parade. I was even issued a set of finger cymbals, to provide music for the event. In the other hand, I carried sticks of burning incense.

After a few minutes, we began our journey again, and wound up at a two-story, industrialized, steel building near the sacred Ganges River. I was surprised to see that this particular cadaver would be cremated in an electric oven (cost: about seventy dollars), rather than the traditional wooden pyre (forty dollars). I received permission to take photos of her silk-clad form. I offered my condolences to the husband of this deceased, middle-class woman and then, being a non-Hindu, departed prior to her immolation.

After I left the crematorium, I took an unusual route along the Ganges River. It was late August, and the water had receded from the *ghats* (steps) that lined the river for miles on end. I weaved my way along these ghats, dodging a series of electric pumps, which were all working overtime to remove the mud from the descending stair steps. The motors' racket was deafening, and the scene less than picturesque.

It was unbearably hot and muggy, perhaps 110 degrees Fahrenheit, with the humidity in the upper nineties. I felt weak and terribly overheated. I stopped and stood knee deep in the black, filthy river water. There were a few Hindu pilgrims in the area, most of them taking a full, ritualistic dip in the "healing" waters. I was only willing to allow the Ganges' toxic fluid to reach my mid-thigh, although I took a couple of handfuls and swabbed my bare shoulders, purely out of necessity. A heavy layer of wood ash, human bone-dust, and raw sewage floated on top of the river, which was strangely juxtaposed to bright, gorgeous, devotional flower garlands celebrating the numerous cremations taking place along the banks. Together, these symbols of life's-passing drifted lazily with the current.

After a few minutes, I continued along the *ghats* until I reached the epicenter of the cremation area. Families were busy dipping their young children in the murk, following a

series of ritualistic oblations. I walked on until I took up a vantage point on a high cement platform, which allowed me a full panorama of Benares' riverbanks. I could see a mid-sized crowd of vendors selling various items: incense, garlands, prayers on plastic cards, idols, ribbons, saris, head-shaving razors, as well as a plethora of salves, potions, and cosmetic pastes intended for purchase by pilgrims. I decided to join them. I took photographs of dying lepers, then paid them for the privilege. They had no objection to the transaction.

A drunk Hindu man, probably in his mid-twenties, approached me. He was hoping to pass himself off as a holy man. After a couple of minutes of hearing his schpiel, I brusquely requested his departure. It was the off-season, and his usual supply of naïve tourists was almost non-existent. There were very few Westerners in Benares at all, due to the mightily oppressive heat. He finally stumbled off to hassle someone else, perhaps an individual less short-fused than me.

I slowly walked over to a cremation pyre being prepared for the next body. A young man in a loincloth was busy stacking a cord of cottonwood branches into a rectangle. Two other *wallas* were sweeping up the ashes from the previous cremation. I had a decision to make.

I returned to my vantage point, which was about fifty yards from the cremation pyre. I felt I had a world-class photo opportunity, if I played my cards properly. I had an ethical issue to deal with, however. I knew it was terribly wrong to photograph a cremation in progress. I wrestled mightily with this dilemma. I suppose almost an hour was spent vacillating back and forth as to whether or not to snap the shot, should the chance present itself. After much deliberation, I decided that I had not come this far, only to walk away

with no record of this crucial event. I hid my camera inside my shirt and worked my way down to the pyre.

When I arrived at the scene, a body had just been placed on the wooden pyre. About two dozen dispassionate observers, all Hindu men, formed a half-circle around the pyre. I spotted a pile of bamboo poles resting below the level of the pyre. They were strewn along the ghats, and formed a perfect little bridge. I carefully stepped out onto the poles. I then put my knees on the bamboo, which placed my chest just above the cement embankment. I was now quite close to the body. I watched the proceedings from this position, as the men lit the pyre. A plume of smoke immediately rose from the lighted material. I slowly unbuttoned two buttons from my shirt and eased my camera out through the opening. I kept a watchful eye on the *wallas*, while I estimated where to aim my camera. I took two shots in this manner. I then planned my exit, this time lowering my head down and raising my camera to my partially hidden face. I snapped a third shot, knowing I had properly ‘squared up’ the subject matter. I then departed, doing my best to blend into the crowd.

I made it about forty yards, when I heard someone say, “Sir... Sir!” I had a very bad feeling that someone was calling *me*. I picked up my pace a little and continued to move through the throngs of people. The voice behind me became more frequent, louder, and more urgent. I continued to ignore this individual and worked harder to disappear into the swarming masses of people. I wanted to make it to the streets, where I might be free. A man came up from behind me and took hold of my arm. I turned and faced him.

His eyes were terribly blood-shot, and he was highly agitated. I thought he might be drunk or stoned. I recognized him as one of the funeral *wallas*.

He shouted at me, “You can not take picture! You can not take picture!” He held out his hand as though he wanted money. I told him I had decided not to take a picture, but he wasn’t buying it. Again he shouted, “You can not take picture!” and again stuck his hand out for his bribe. Reluctantly, I reached into my pocket and pulled out a handful of coins. I suppose the whole lot of them didn’t amount to one dollar. I handed him the coins and yelled back that I hadn’t taken a picture. He looked at the money with disgust, put it in his pocket, and then swore at me in his local dialect. I got the point quite clearly. I had been the quintessential Ugly American. He gave me a look that would kill, muttered some more epithets, and finally departed.

I walked back to my hotel room in a funk. I hated making cultural miscues, even though it is virtually impossible to avoid them. Even the most conscientious traveler routinely breaks the rules, usually out of ignorance. I, on the other hand, had deliberately committed a serious taboo-infraction. I was anything but proud of myself, and flopped down on my mattress in a heap. I tossed the camera and my fanny pack into my backpack, kicked my flip-flops off, and tried to take a nap. The angry face of the *walla*, his red eyes aglow and mouth foaming, occupied my mind’s eye. I couldn’t shake his image, although I tried to rationalize the event by discounting him as a shakedown-artist, and a drunken, heroin addict to boot.

I finally got up and slapped the swamp cooler in the right spot, and it clanked and hummed, then began to spit misty water in my general direction. I poured the rest of my bottled water over my head and finally got to where I could fall asleep. When I woke up, it was very dark... almost as dark as my mood. I pulled on the brownish, greasy string

attached to the bare bulb that hung from frayed wires in the center of the ceiling. I stared at the peeling paint on the ceiling for quite some time. I watched a squadron of huge flies hanging upside-down. Occasionally one would leave formation, but it was far too hot for the flies to expend much energy. I could hear mice in the adjoining bathroom, squealing and fighting over scraps of *chapatti* the houseboy had neglected to sweep up (from the prior tenants' occupancy.) I felt something creeping along my scalp line. I pulled a flea out of my hair, and tried to squeeze it between my fingernails. It hopped away from my death grip like a tiddlywink.

I pulled a damp cloth over my face and rolled over to try to escape reality for a little while. "Great. Just f-ing great!" I muttered.

An Interview with Jay

After due consideration, I chose to have someone interview me for my role as both participant in this study and as the photographer who took the picture of the funeral pyre scene. I felt that a dialogic format (similar to that of Rolling Stone magazine) might be more conducive to spurring my memories of childhood through adulthood and help clarify any muddled or inexact language I might use. The following is a copy of the transcript of that interview:

S.D.: So, “Jimmy”, tell me about your ethnic background.

Jay: “My dad was Scottish and many of my ancestors were principally from the Isle of Mann, so we have a family plaid and we have our coat of arms, and I have these artifacts. The running legs – the three running legs is the symbol of our clan and it’s Manx. I’m not overly attached or proud, but I think it’s worthwhile knowing a little bit about one’s history. I keep the part that’s interesting to me from a socio-artistic point of view.”

“On my mother’s side, French. That may be where I get my slightly darker skin than my sisters, who are white skinned, blue eyed. One sister has very light colored, freckled skin with blue eyes and black hair, which is kind of interesting. I’m darker than the rest and that’s probably the Mediterranean thing – the old Roman soldiers becoming the Gauls. On my mother’s side, we’re directly descended from the line of Jefferson Davis. It shows quite clearly in his severe facial structure, which I have inherited.”

“I’m tied to the fact that I was born and raised in Los Angeles, but I have spent a far longer period of time in rural Colorado and now New Mexico. A greater influence would be that my mother was from the West Texas dust bowl, because we were raised, in certain respects, as though it was still the dust bowl – I mean to a degree. She loosened up in time, but we were frugal: Watch every penny and you won’t go broke.”

“We were kind of like “Leave it to Beaver,” except Ward didn’t come home until late at night. He worked (and worked) his way up from factory employee to top executive. We were probably a modest form of middle class when I was young and then later on, in high

school, we lived in a upscale Tutor-style place with a swimming pool, if that is some indicator of social class. None of us played into that classist thing anyway. We saw all that as crap. All of us.”

S.D.: What role did gender play in your household, in your upbringing?

Jay: “Thankfully, my dad was never the type of guy to “build” a macho son or anything. So I could have been anything basically I wanted. In his absence, I was coddled and adored by three old ladies for the first three years of my life like I was Little Lord Fauntleroy. That babying was soon replaced with an overwhelming sense of responsibility.

“In all likelihood, my dad would have loved it if I had been a businessman, although he never out-rightly indicated so. From day one, I had neither an aptitude or an interest in becoming a Suit with neatly parted hair. I wound up being a guy who likes to draw.”

S. D.: And gender?

Jay: When you’re an art teacher, they usually think that you’re going to be this way or the that. I mean I’ve heard it repeated throughout my life. I’ve never paid much attention to such a stereotype. As a kid I also play sports, you know, and walked hard on my heels. I’m gendered male, by the straight world’s standards. I have no issues with it one way or the other-- that’s the way it is. I have, over the years, come to vigorously defend the rights of those that are gendered otherwise.”

S.D.: Was your dad John Wayne?

Jay: “No, but he was certainly capable of supporting and protecting us, when duty called. He was mild-mannered, very mild mannered, and a man of very few words, but you knew that he meant what he said. Very straightforward, so he wasn’t meek. He was just quiet, reserved, and very private. He was never one to start telling the room how to live, or what to think. He was very tolerant of most situations.”

“The flip side to that was that he wasn’t one for sharing important details of his life. If I hadn’t “interviewed” him from time to time, I wouldn’t have known anything about him. I had a very formal relationship with my dad. I called him.... this is unbelievable.... I called him “Fath” which was a shortened version of Father, until I was probably at least 12 or 13. Then one day, I walked down the stairs from upstairs and I said, “From now on, you’re Dad.” It seems ridiculous for this to have happened. There was love in our family, but it was rarely expressed in words. As he grew old, we grew closer. We were so different from one another, however, that we never did form an inseparable bond or any other such idyllic platitude.

I had a job after school most nights of the week. I’d get home about 9:30 or 10:00 p.m. My dad would be pulling in the driveway about that time, so it was time to eat dinner! It’s just the way we did it. It’s strange as I think back, but that was the way it was. A family of “workin’ fools.”

S.D.: What role did your mom play? I mean was she the classic 50’s, 60’s mother?

Jay: “My mother was born and lived in Idaho until the age of 10. She’s still alive. She’s 87, as of a few days ago. Born in Wendell, Idaho and then moved to Lubbock, Texas in the 1930s. She was 10 years old... just in time for that horrendous Dust Bowl and Depression.

Her mother owned and ran this little sliver of a room.... a long, thin room that they had as a café. The whole family ran this café throughout the Depression, kids included. They passed out a lot of free food and coffee, even though they couldn't afford to do so."

"Working as a young girl through the Depression had a huge influence on my mother, because she used to talk about. She is a lot like her own mother in many ways, except much more upbeat, positive. I think my grandmother, who was a real scrapper, – Grandmother Davis, was much like Jefferson Davis must have been. They all looked stern and rigid. High cheekbones, furrowed brow, severe continence. I have that kind of look.

"My Mom was a pretty forceful person in her day. She ruled the roost and, and while I was a young kid, she could, at times, be pretty tough on me. She took the bit in her teeth and ran with it. My mom's world was compartmentalized into basically her idea of right and wrong. She had a very high regard for activity, action, so I think I inherited some of her compulsion to be doing something and be doing it "right," if I possibly could.

S.D.: Now, we're looking at the funeral pyre picture – this is a picture that you took but a picture that others have seen and I would like for you to give an actual description of the photo that you see.

Jay: "I'm going to take it right down to the very basics. My first level of description on this is that it's a two dimensional surface. I'm the guy that took the picture with a mechanical instrument and then took the film out of it and had it developed, got it back, put it through a computer, fractalized it to clean it up even more, had it printed and now it's a bunch of.... thousands and thousands and thousands of microscopic little blobs of ink – colored ink – on a sheet of paper that's got width and breadth, but no depth. Two-

dimensional. So, taken down to its basic form, it's just fractalized images that come together on paper to make both a symbol and an icon.”

“So first, on one level, it's just if you talk about it in semiotic terms, it's an index – the blobs of ink, are indexical-- they point to something. What it points to is that, if you put all the blobs together, it becomes a symbol. What I see as symbol is a body on a funeral pyre about to be lit and that becomes an icon. From there, I could talk more about what I see. From the literal sense, I see fractalized imagery.”

S.D.: You've used the word “fractal” and “icon” or “iconic.” Tell me why you think this is iconic in nature?

Jay: “According to the terminology I'm using here, the word “icon” is like the third level of sign and symbol. It's what you see when it represents “what it is.” In other words, most people would agree that it's some sort of body or body shape on a pyre. So in that sense, it represents something recognizable to each individual.”

S.D.: So as an icon, does this mean more to you than just the two-dimensional, fractal picture that you told us about?

Jay: “I see that on two levels and they're both interesting to me. The fractalized level is “something” that is a theme that I think you may see as we move along here. I'm trying to say that an icon is... let's take the Mother Mary. Most people that know that's Mother Mary agree that that's a statue of Mother Mary. So that would be an icon. But then she also is a symbol, in that she stands for something, such as universal compassion. The icon is nothing

more than what it is. So what I see here in this picture is what I call an icon. In other words, what I recognize.”

“It is a picture of a woman. Even if I wasn’t the one that took the picture, I’d still think it was a woman, you know. Of course, I was there, too, so what can I say? Now on the level of the fractal, I’m saying the picture is fractalized in the same way that, for instance, they use fractalization to zoom in and pinpoint geography now from satellites. Same exact principle. Regenerating the same piece of information instantly.... part of the drawing and then replicating that until it replicates itself into getting clearer, redefining itself. So that’s what I mean by fractal.”

S.D.: So tell me about associations made through this photograph.

Jay: “I’ve thought long and hard about this issue and this is why I kind of called my section “Visceral Response.” The composite experience invaded all of my faculties. My associations range farther than any confining elements of the imagery itself. Physically, the location of the event was so hot, so humid that my recollections, to this day, are imbued with my clear recollection of experiencing sensory overload due to the sights and sounds alone.”

“I had endured a long, long day. I must have walked twenty miles. I started out very early that morning (the day that I took this shot) and I had walked all over town following yet another corpse that was being carried by six guys over their heads. They were carrying the body through the streets in route to the *ghats* where they were going to perform a cremation, just like this one (in the photo).”

“So I said to myself, “Well, why not just follow them and see where they go?” I followed them for a couple of miles. I followed along behind them until they put the body down and took their cigarette break. Then I walked up and asked them if it would be improper if I joined the procession, or if it would be okay. I told them I was interested in the process. They said, “By all means. Join us. Let’s go.” So I just followed them. But instead of the procession going down to the funeral ghats, the stair steps down to the Ganges, they went to the Ganges but they went into a crematorium -- a modern building. More like a steel mill. It was very...”

S.D.: Industrialized?

Jay: “Absolutely industrial! I went right up the steel stairs with them. I couldn’t take pictures inside the crematorium. But I went right up to the point to where they were going to put the body in the chamber and fire up the oven, and that’s when I finally excused myself. My time to go had come, and it was the right time to take off. That’s when I went down and took several shots through these narrow winding streets. It’s a very winding place... nothing more than re-vamped oxen paths.”

S.D.: Wow. Wild. You told me, yesterday, about the associations with this photo and today I want you to analyze that picture. Would you describe how your associations tie in with how you’re analyzing? Then tell me your analysis of it.

Jay: “I look at this from a visceral response, meaning I guess that I kind of *felt* it – the shot is part of the whole day and the day was so intense that I felt it in my body as well as my mind. To actually be there.... watching the body burn, for instance, undoubtedly alters my

perception and response. Whereas other person might be frightened or repulsed, I reacted in another fashion. A foreigner that comes in and sees this scene might or might not see it on several different levels. At no time did I react with horror. It's a human body lying there. Once the shroud burns, the body starts to bubble and morph. But rather than being horrified or anything, I just had a kind of a... I wasn't numb – but kind of felt detached and yet highly alert and sensitized. It was a paradoxical reaction to an experience, indeed.

S.D.: So do you have other associations with this?

Jay: “Yeah. I see the burning of the body on that level as a completion of entropy. The entropic water shed, as it is commonly referred to. This phenomenon takes place at all times, but is most noticeable at the moment of death. So, from a symbolic point of view, I think there's the issue of completing the task where all the fuel has been burned out. The fuel metaphor, I think, is something that will show up in the analysis, to answer your question. I wouldn't be a bit surprised. And the whole idea... again with entropics, we might speculate on where the Soul, if there's a Soul, or the karmic body, as the Buddhist would say, where does that go?”

“This brings up the issue of thermodynamics (not that I'm an authority on it) but I know the first law is that matter can neither be created nor destroyed, and the second law is that energy changes from potentially useful to spent. We all reach a point where (if we live long enough) we see our apex, our subsequent decline, and then our final dissolution into something new. Whether that transfers into rebirth or reincarnation is a mystery to me. I have to take it on theory until I know it for myself on an experiential level.”

S.D.: I asked you about the association, and making that transition from your associations to your analysis of the picture. Can you go strictly into the analysis of that picture? You talked about the visceral experience....

Jay: “The point being that, as I was taking the picture, it was the combination of all the things going on at the same time that all combine to form *me*.... I mean, why did I choose this (particular photograph)? I felt that, based on my own existential experience, it would stir up certain points in peoples’ memory and make associations that are maybe semiotically metaphoric, maybe not. As I look at this photograph and I think of my analysis, if I were to put it into words at this point, I would say that I see this as an energy situation. In the photograph, there are handmade cow patties stuck on the wall where you retrieve them and that’s part of how you get this fire going. I mean they don’t use gasoline. You don’t pour gas on the fire. This fire takes a while to go. That’s why on a certain level, it too is visceral because literally the body still has enough moisture to bubble, pop, and bloat up. So you watch this and I’ve watched plenty of it. Back in ’72, I sat almost mindlessly for days watching bodies burn. Hours on end, for several days. My mind was a total blank. I was neither repulsed nor attracted. I simply sat there and watched it. The second time around, my experience was more acute.”

“So I have deep, deep, deep connections to this photo because I *have* seen it before. Not just in Benares, but all over India. It’s out there in your face. Death is all around you. And if it’s not death, it’s somebody with a portion of his/her body and head... lying on a little square skateboard, begging and howling. That’s what I think of when I see this picture. I have images well up from my subconscious. It’s archetypal again. I can relate to it as

sitting there and having feelings welling up and then passing away. Some of them quite extreme.... just hitting on every emotion.”

“I’ve had plenty of time to ‘digest’ that, to use Carmen’s way of speaking. To digest it, to analyze it would have to be my relationship as the photographer, the person there, the guy that elected to pull the trigger on a machine that ultimately makes this digital printout. You talk about abstract! Photography itself is simultaneously both surreal and hard-core real, because you have this hard copy in your hands – this instrument, this technological tool.

In my case, every afternoon since I took well over 1,200 shots, I made constant trips back and forth to the funky Kodak place in Delhi, or wherever I was. Getting them processed as quickly as possible, but the instant “feedback” was amazing. It soon became a group effort involving my guide, my driver, myself, and virtually anyone else who invited themselves into our discussions, whether it was in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, or wherever.”

“At the time, I didn’t think there was all that much value to them other than their immediate value. My friend Khurshid, my occasional traveling companion.... he and I would pour over them, but I never thought of them as a gallery collection. That came later. When I got back to the States, we ran them through my colleague’s digital program. He cleaned them up, fractalized them and that’s why I speak of these photos as, not only literally fractalized, but symbolically, metaphorically. Yeah, to me, this particular photo is the sum total of all my experiences traveling, and then some.”

S.D.: Basically, for purposes related to your dissertation, you had three different sets of eyes look at this photograph and three different perceptions came up with three different

abstractions and analysis of that photo. What role do you think those perceptions played, because ultimately you've got more invested in this than the other two. How do you think that changed how the analyses of that picture went, because of your experience with it, as opposed to the other two who were not?

Jay: "I do see what you're saying about having more of myself invested into this project. But the response from the other two participants eventually became more than what a "typical" study is designed to do. I guess it's due to the nature of the picture. It conjures up.... its pretty good grist for the mill. And I knew that I'd get rich text... "thick description" back, but I didn't realize that there'd be a kind of ongoing study.... that we'd meet far more than any study would call for. We'd continue to work on it and go back and forth and there's a point, I think, where process and analysis fuse."

"Associations are made and analyzed from there, so they kind of blend together. When I think of this project in its totality, I think of interplay between the participants and myself, where we passed the ball back and forth. Yes, I took the photo, but then the participant would get into it and take on the photo and really think about thinking. As that process continued to evolve, we'd forgotten about fulfilling obligations. It's more like the study took on a life of its own, I'd say. I think I've gotten into what the other participant was saying as much as I got into my own. It has balanced out. I feel like I'm a participant, but not the dominant factor anymore. At one point, of course, it was all my stuff and I was placing it out there for peoples' examination. But as our conversations continued to grow in number, things evened out. It's no longer my story, it's our story and then it flip-flops back to my analysis but then that gets morphed into the next phase, so it keeps changing."

S.D.: How have the other participants' perception of the photo changed your perception of the photo?

Jay: "The things that I've been able to kind of.... I call it coding, highlighting, honing in on.... there have been key things from this. One such factor is *change* and another is turning back and taking *responsibility* for one's actions while a person has a choice moment to be karmically "active." Looking at a picture of death... that provokes "what do I do in the here and now?" The funeral pyre scene has been as much about living richly and explorations of our active-state as it has about dying. There hasn't been a tremendous amount of dwelling on such things as an afterlife in some sort of heaven, or other such related concerns."

"My concluding remarks will probably be written more 'scholastically,' but, for me, the key part of this dissertation is this type of dialogue we are having this moment. That's the style that reflects what we're really doing.... collaborating. And that has been very emotional and most definitely cathartic for me. When I hear the responses, for instance, one participant was very personal, a personal history, and that was a very emotional experience to share with me. Then there's my other participant, who I know, is an emotional person. Still, I would classify that participant's response as more or less an intellectual approach to the research. We were taking a look at spiritual themes, but putting it into words that were theory-based. There was, perhaps, not quite as much emphasis on our emotive selves in Sam's interviews as there were with Carmen's."

"The mere fact that I divided them into "intellectual, emotional, and visceral" is still putting tags on something where, in fact, they actually blended into one another much more

than they were separate. When I speak of the participant that was more intellectual, I don't mean that he was any less attuned to the picture itself and the project at hand. The project fused into – we're talking about art theory, life theory, and philosophy. It all blends together, so it's emotive, it's all of those. But, in Sam's case when we had to put into a language that can be discussed, we used the Buddhist framework, and that requires some use of one's "supra-rational" faculties. And of course, with Buddhism, we know that there's irony in trying to talk about anything, because of the way they view linguistics as being kind of a clumsy means of communication. We have to communicate somehow, but words aren't always the best manner."

"At the actual site of the cremation, activity takes on an associative, symbolic tone. They put a little bit of that body-dust into a tiny little sailboat made of paper. They light the sailboat's candle (which serves as a mast), and they push it out into the Ganges River. This action is thought to release the last bit of energy back into the cosmos to be reshaped again. So on one level, I see that. One sees that literally when you're right there at the funeral ghats. One sees that take place. But then symbolically, I think, it's the end of one energy form, which then cycles into the next energy formation. So Buddhism and Hinduism and other such belief systems say that the consciousness remains intact and when the time is right, it reincarnates, or in the Buddhist case, doesn't (technically) reincarnate, but rather, there's a rebirth that takes place. Buddhists don't believe in transmigration of the Soul, but rather the transference of one's entire karmic "history" into a new 'karmic body', which is somehow associated with or attached to the new physical body. Some sort of energy-form based on this (they say) constitutes an entity that comes back."

“I view this phenomenon through the study of the Theory of Thermodynamics as well as Entropy Theory, which both state that energy can neither be created nor destroyed but only changed. When that change occurs, material (energy) moves from usable to consumed. If there is a metaphor behind this literal picture of a cadaver being burned, it’s that they’re burning the body to finish the entropic process, whereupon the body is completely reduced down to carbon. If anything, it serves as a reminder that this very moment, here and now, would be the time to work through karma.”

“My focus has been on our collective response and it has more to do with being in the living moment for all three participants. It’s death, but it’s more about rebirth or activity than it is inertia. So for me, if I were to analyze it, I might refer to it more or less as a vehicle by which I explored ways that I can reexamine what I do for a “life,” in terms of my best utilization of the immediate future. Addressing adjustments that I can make today. I’m in a position to use what this study has taught me. One of these understandings is to start using the present even more diligently in order to best facilitate my ongoing, metamorphic process.”

JAY’S STORY: AN ANALYSIS

In 1875, the Theosophical Society was founded in New York by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott. Many such organizations sprang up following the horror and bloodshed of the Civil War. Mary Baker Eddy (Christian Science, 1879) and Charles Taze Russell

(Jehovah's Witnesses, 1878) were two other successful entrepreneurs (Bawer, 1997, p. 88). Post-Civil War Spiritualism was gaining widespread power and influence. Pews were at capacity, and coffers spilled over.

In 1882, The Theosophical Society extended its realm to India, by purchasing 260 acres in Adyar, near Madras. Part of the Society's mission was to search for, obtain, raise and train the "Maitreya"-- the next world Savior. An alleged psychic and aura-reader, Charles Leadbeater, helped operate this particular branch of the Society. One day he spotted a young boy wandering outside the compound. He instantly 'recognized' this child as "the physical vehicle for Maitreya."

This boy and his brother, Nitya, were brought inside the gates. They were bathed, deloused, and given an examination to determine the degree of their malnourishment. Soon, the two boys were being privately tutored. Eventually, "Mrs. Besant", who in 1911 founded the Theosophical Society's new "Order of the Star in the East", adopted both boys. This organization would herald the return of the Maitreya-- which was the older of the two boys. His name was Krishnamurti.

Krishnamurti was sent to Paris for schooling. He read the classics and was given a top-level education, which included ballet, galleries, film, and much travel. He and Nitya were then transported to Ojai, California, in anticipation of Krishnamurti's acclaim as the world's new Christ-like sage.

It was in Ojai that Krishnamurti had a succession of visions during *vipasana*. In November of 1925, his brother, Nitya, died of tuberculosis. The combination of these events

transformed Krishnamurti. In August of 1929, before three thousand Society members, Krishnamurti dissolved the Order of the Star. In what must have been a bewildered and perhaps outraged group, he began his speech by saying, “I maintain that truth is a pathless land, and you can not approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect.” He ended his speech by saying, “You can form other organizations and expect someone else. With that I am not concerned, nor with creating new cages, new decorations for those cages. My only concern is to set men absolutely, unconditionally free.”

The next year, Krishnamurti formally resigned from the Theosophical Society. He spoke to large audiences from 1933 until 1939. During World War II, he spent his time in seclusion, discussing philosophy with his friends. Among his closest colleagues were Aldous Huxley, Jonas Salk, Bertrand Russell, David Bohm, and Walpola Rahula (who is cited extensively in the analysis of “Sam’s Story”).

In New Delhi, India (1972), I had an opportunity to attend one of Krishnamurti’s lectures. I had been aware of his writings since 1969. I was terribly ill with amoebic dysentery and was confined to my bed in the inner city. I wanted desperately to attend his lecture, because I was in great need of advisement at that particular point in time. To this day, I still deeply regret not being able to attend.

Krishnamurti died of pancreatic cancer on February 17, 1986 in Ojai, California. His transcribed talks and his writings are his legacy. I am using one of the collections of his discussions, entitled “Reflections on the Self” (1997) as a means by which to analyze my own story as it relates to my semiotic reaction to the cremation photograph.

Interpretive Ethnography: Issues of Control

Micro ethnographic study seems to operate on many psychological levels. These various striations undulate, weaving into and out of themselves while combining to form new, yet-to-be explored angles and insights. Structured *and* free form dialogue braid together. Opinion, fact, and postulation roll and flow into one another. Growth is spurred by both epiphany and confusion. A researcher should learn to traverse along this trail by knowing when to speak and when not to. “These two things are essential that we may communicate with each other: listening and learning” (Krishnamurti, p. 3).

As a field researcher, I have always liked to place myself in situations where I am “the Other.” When I am the outsider looking in, whether it be in a sleepy village or a bustling city under military attack, my status is usually tenuous, and subject to swift change. I have found that I must be alert and fluid in my thought and motion. When I have failed to do so, the results have brought calamity.

“If we *try* to listen, we find it extraordinarily difficult because we are always projecting our opinions and ideas, our prejudices, our background, our inclinations, our impulses; when they dominate we hardly listen to what is being said. In that state there is no value at all” (Krishnamurti, p.3). This statement is particularly true of situations in which data collection is performed with participants whose cultural make-up is more familiar to me. The value of a study such as this one is that it provides an opportunity to reflect upon

and refine my approach toward ethnographic interpretation.

All ethnographers enter a situation full to the brim with opinions and hypotheses. We are conditioned through the duration of our education, both formally and informally, to cultivate a “body of knowledge.” Not to do so is regarded as vacillation and uncertainty, two less-than-admirable traits in our society. So one clings to his dogmatic understandings and has faith in his position. This “faith invariably breeds violence” (Krishnamurti, p.5), because rigidity is the anathema to insight. These seeds (bija) of faith, extended beyond my limited meaning related to data collection and analysis, are still associated with more overt forms of conflict. My certainty is my roadblock, for “unless there is a radical transformation in the very foundation of ourselves, what we do say or feel has very little meaning” (Krishnamurti, p. 6).

“Because we are educated, we are conditioned to accept authority, because that is the easiest and most convenient way to live” (Krishnamurti, p. 8). I may rail against the most visible forms of authority, but my counter-position simply represents another source of influence. “By merely conforming to the pattern of what you already know... you are no longer learning about yourself” (Krishnamurti, p. 8), and I, to this point, am certainly a living exponent of this fact. During data collection, I bring expectations. I do not come empty-handed. Yet, “to investigate, there must be freedom from motive” (Krishnamurti, p.10). These motives are related to “the urge to conform, which is the desire for security.... (it) breeds fear and brings to the fore the political and religious authorities, the leaders and heroes who encourage subservience and by whom we are subtly or grossly dominated” (p. 13). If successful participation in interpretive study is to occur, “the wise wield no authority,

and those in authority are not wise” (p.15).

Pitfalls occur when least expected. During my interviews, I have found that “the more gratifying the answer, the quicker (I) accept it” (p. 17). More than once, I found myself presupposing the answer as my participants were speaking. Thankfully, both of them were strong-minded individuals who were more than ready to clarify disconnections. Much of the reliability of this study hinges on this honest interplay between interviewer and interviewee. “We can not face the fact, whatever it be, as long as we have explanations, as long as words fill our minds” (p. 17). There comes a time when the data collector must learn to relinquish the sometimes very subtle hierarchy of power associated with his role.

Funeral Pyre Imagery: “The Wonder and the Terror”

In westernized societies, notably the United States, the death process is hidden from view. When the death event cannot be satisfactorily removed from the public’s sight, it is sanitized and modified to the point of theatre. Consequently, death is feared, and speaking on the topic is often confined to forensic medicine seminars. A person could conceivably live their entire life without ever even having to look at a corpse. The negative repercussion is that many Americans have difficulty working through and accepting death as a natural occurrence.

In India, death is omnipresent, and for many, must actually come as a blessing.

Many Americans, me included, see death as an interruption to our work. We spend our energy trying to ‘become’ whatever model we have established as our goal. We hone ourselves, participating in a constant grooming toward the culmination of a project of our own creation. We say that, “death cheated him,” if the end comes “prematurely.” Bound up in this concern is the western notion of time, and its wise, practical usage.

I learned a great deal from experiencing my father’s death. He spent the majority of his life working for a large corporation. He loved his work, and it was his principal source of happiness and fulfillment. He worked his way up the ladder through tireless effort, and by all accounts, his honesty and integrity.

The last ten years of his life were spent succumbing to Alzheimer’s. He slowly faded away into silence, as my mother cared for him tirelessly until a nursing home became her last option. Now, only a handful of us remember his tireless life’s work. I constantly marvel at how, in a short while, his accomplishments (Harvard among them) will fade into oblivion once and for all, when we four family members pass away.

If there is a fear of death, it is that death brings to a close our understanding, gleaned from life’s experiences. It brings to a close our relationship with those around us. “Thought and time are the central factors of fear. They are one. Thought is not separate from time” (p. 49). These words of Krishnamurti’s signal the relationship between our notion of time as a precious commodity and our thoughts, which keep us bound to time’s constraints.

Carmen referred to Death, which (in Yaqui terms) constantly “stalks” us and hovers over our left shoulder. Don Juan Matus taught that a person of knowledge learns to harness

the fear and learns to respect death for its gift. With no death, life's precious value would be non-existent. The paradox is awe-inspiring. Other traditions see the death process as an opportunity for true humility, for no amount of money or prestige can buy one's way out of this process. "Where there is self-interest there must be fear, and all the consequences of fear" (Krishnamurti, p. 50).

If we view our individual conditions harnessed to a timetable, as I have, we are cautioned, "fact is infinitely more important than an idea" (p. 51). The fact is, according to non-Christian belief systems, time is a mental construct and death is neither absolute nor indefinite. The moment of death is a passing moment, as all composite things are subject to dissolution. More changes then emerge from previous changes, and the pattern continues unabated. If one deeply analyzes the death experience, chances are it is not death, per se, that is the cause for fear. "We are afraid of death. I am talking of fear in *relation* to death" (p.51). It is the associations we make *surrounding* death. "The fear is of the things taken away from me, the 'me' disappearing into oblivion" (p. 51).

I admit that I am caught up in the "doing," and seek to make each day as 'successful' as possible. This is a very westernized concept, and I have taken it about to the limit. Sociocultural theory is a deep, penetrating look at the human condition, and I quote these theorists quite extensively throughout my various writings. However, many sociocultural theorists are also historical materialists and have no use for any speculation on the possibility of an afterlife. It is their certainty of death as the end of life that forms a schism whereby they and I must ultimately part ways. Limiting our capacity to explore possibilities is to construct unnecessary roadblocks in human development. This point is underscored by the

fact that sociocultural theorists such as Vygotsky have led the way in the field of semiotics. One might wonder why non-Buddhist semioticians have not been more involved in studying the “cessation of the modulations of consciousness” (*citta vritti nirodha*). “To be free of the word is an extraordinary state. Being aware of the symbol, the word, the name, is awareness of the fact at a different dimension” (Krishnamurti, p. 52).

I believe that Carmen used the metaphor of wielding the Obsidian Knife, as part of her metaphoric commentary, to “cut through” the veil of illusion. She sought to address the issue of binarism, whereby we draw divisions between complimentary opposites. She spoke of the relationship between terror and wonder, between the macrocosm of solar systems and the microcosm of the human entity. She spoke of the relationship between captor and captive-- not just historically, but metaphysically. “That is the whole problem-- not how to get rid of fear, not how to be courageous, not what to do about fear, but to be fully with the fact,” states Krishnamurti (p. 53). “As long as the mind spawns its own fears in terms of time, it is incapable of understanding that which is timeless” (p. 55).

Like Carmen, Sam took a non-dogmatic approach when he spoke of the Buddhist stance toward the death ritual illustrated in my photograph. Krishnamurti, who renounced all organized systems, echoed Buddhist understandings: “When there is no censor who condemns (fear); there is only that state of emptiness-- with which we are all really quite familiar, but which we are all avoiding, trying to fill it with activity, with worship, with prayer, with knowledge, with every form of illusion and excitement” (p. 58). Like Krishnamurti, Sam focused on penetrating the outward appearance of phenomena. Both men sought to break down and de-mystify the relationship between time and thought / language.

Funeral Pyre Imagery: Recognizing the Mechanics of Change

When I speak of fear in relation to the death imagery, I am referring to fear in its many various manifestations. Much of the source of our fears are subconscious and pour out as electrical charges from chemicals produced by the amygdala, hypothalamus, and adrenals. These organs constitute our primal reactions from the “reptilian” core at the base of the brain. Jungians place great import on the archetypal imagery influenced by these organs’ secretions. Certain mental formations arising from these sources, if the impulse is strong enough, result in archetypal imagery. Once the conscious mind has encoded and decoded these information bytes, the individual is in a position to convert them into some form of sense perception. At this point, the ‘rational’ self comes into play, in an attempt to manipulate encoded data into some form of recognizable system. The seed of consciousness has come to fruition. Krishnamurti insisted, “it is this very process of running away from *what is* that fear arises” (p. 59).

Sam’s interpretation of the funeral pyre imagery is based on Buddha’s teachings concerning Conditioned Genesis (*paticca-samuppada*). As stated earlier, Buddhist treatise were passed down orally, so much of the philosophy has a lyrical quality to it, with a peculiar, repetitive style which could then be more easily and accurately memorized. I normally refer to Conditioned Genesis as its alternative title, Dependent Co-origination. The principle behind this doctrine is contained in four short lines:

When this is, that is (*Imasmim sati idam hoti*)

This arising, that arises (*Imassuppada idam uppajjati*);

When this is not, that is not (*Imasmim asati idam na hoti*);

This ceasing, that ceases (*Imassa nirodha idam nirujjhati*).

Such simple prose for so complex an issue! The law of Dependent Co-origination deconstructs conditionality, relativity, and interdependence-- the whole existence and continuity of life and its cessation (Rahula, p. 53). Those individuals familiar with Hindu philosophy know that it has been recorded in a step-down, linear style. Hinduism builds from one point to another in cascading rationality. Having come out of that tradition, Buddha's words were recorded similarly. Although Conditioned Genesis occurs simultaneously, it is written as follows:

1. Through ignorance are conditioned volitional actions or karma-formations (*Avijjapacchiya samkhara*).
2. Through volitional actions is conditioned consciousness (*Samkharapaccaya vinnanam*).
3. Through consciousness are conditioned mental and physical phenomena (*Vinnanapaccaya namarupam*).
4. Through mental and physical phenomena are conditioned the six faculties (i.e. five physical sense organs and mind) (*Namarupapaccaya salayatanam*).

5. Through the six faculties is conditioned (sensorial and mental) contact (*Salayatanapaccaya phasso*).
6. Through (sensorial and mental) contact is conditioned sensation (*Phassapaccaya vedana*).
7. Through sensation is conditioned desire, “thirst” (*Vedanapaccaya vedana*).
8. Through desire (thirst) is conditioned clinging (*Tanhapaccaya upadanam*).
9. Through clinging is conditioned the process of becoming (*Upadanapaccaya bhavo*).
10. Through the process of becoming is conditioned birth (*Bhavapaccaya jati*).
11. Through birth are conditioned...
12. Decay, death, lamentation, pain, etc. (*Jatipaccaya jaramaranam*).

According to Buddhist thought, there can be no such thing as the western concept of “free will.” (Rahula, p. 54). “Will, like any other thought is conditioned. If ‘Free Will’ implies a will independent of conditions, independent of cause and effect, such a thing does not exist” (Rahula, p. 55). A paradoxical situation occurs whereby mind must reflect on mind in a state of neither “will-ingness” nor “unwill-ingness.” According to Buddhism, no faith, no Ego, no Soul, *Atman*, or Self stands as an abiding, immortal substance either inside or outside of man. This notion is considered to be only a false mental projection, the result of the inner workings of the Five Aggregates previously mentioned (Rahula, p. 55).

“Only when the mind sees the futility of all that, the absurdity of it, is it capable of looking at itself” (Krishnamurti, p. 60). As the root-cause of *samskara* (roughly translated by me as ‘ordinary life’) “there is always a dependence, a faith in something; as with all dependences there is always fear, and so I set conflict going” (Krishnamurti, p. 60). Fear and thirst (the desire to ‘be’) are closely related as dependent reactions. “So there is always a dependence on something to sustain us; as we depend more and more, there is the cultivation of fear” (Krishnamurti, p. 61).

We all experience moments of conditioned joy, but this momentary experience is countered by its opposite, conditioned emotion. Seeking joy, at least in my case, requires effort and consequently “ceaseless strife dissipates energy” (Krishnamurti, p. 64). However, “there is a possibility of acting without bringing about a series of efforts which condition the mind to a particular action” (p. 61). “We are struggling after something, and we have never paused to inquire if the thing we are after is worth struggling for” (p. 65). “When the mind is not seeking the ‘more’, when it is not comparing, you are no longer concerned with time. Time implies the ‘more’” (p. 66).

Funeral Pyre Imagery: The Act of Becoming

Hindu yogic writings often refer to *citta vritti* or the “vicissitudes of consciousness”. Part of this concept (*trishna*) is that imbedded in a moment of happiness lays its counterpart, unhappiness. “In the very fulfillment of action there is sorrow,” says Krishnamurti (p. 78).

“I want to achieve, I want to arrive, to know a certainty of mind in which there is no conflict” (p. 79). For this reason, he states that effort, no matter how noble, is conditioned and therefore reactionary. This conundrum, for me, both baffles and intrigues.

A second point of interest is that each of these factors is both conditioned (*paticcasamuppanna*) and conditioning (*paticca samuppada*), so that no “first cause” is accepted in Buddhism. This notion stands directly opposed to the “uncaused, first cause” theory proposed by Thomas Aquinas and others to justify the Genesis notion of a Supreme Being who “In the beginning, ...etc.”. Incidentally, this question of whether or not the Cosmos is infinite or finite is one of ten classic Hindu points of philosophical discussion. Whenever these popular questions were posed to Buddha, he sat in “noble silence” until the questioner got tired of waiting for an answer and went away. To answer this type of question one way or the other would have, in Buddha’s way of thinking, been counter-productive to the progress of the aspirant and tangential to the task at hand.

Reminiscent of Jung, Krishnamurti indicated that “it is much more difficult to uncondition the unconscious, which plays a far greater part in our life than the conscious mind” (p. 84). Living, as we do, in an age of dependence upon our rationality, “we are trained to function mechanically in a certain way” (p. 84). “But inwardly, unconsciously, deep down we are the result of many thousands of years of man’s endeavor; we are the sum total of his struggles, his hopes, his despairs, his everlasting search for something beyond, and this piling up of experience is still going on” (p. 84). Even those thoughts and actions we believe to be original or individualized are reactions to past events and influences. “The inward conflict dictates the outer conflict” (p. 85).

“Whenever there is a division there is conflict. There must be a silent and a choiceless awareness of desire” (p. 91). This ‘choiceless awareness’ is, I believe, the result of *vipasana*, although I am sure Krishnamurti would question me on the use of the word “result.” “Result” would imply action / reaction, and therefore a conditioned state of consciousness. “Then you will find that freedom is not freedom from anger, from authority, and so on. It is a state, per se, to be experienced for itself, and not because you are against something” (p. 98).

Funeral Pyre Imagery As An Emancipatory Tutorial

The writings of Roland Barthes have played an important part in connecting Buddhist thought with postmodernism. *Camera Lucida* (1981) explores the role of photography in shaping contemporary art theory and Zen. Barthes has taken two words from Latin, which he felt described two levels of reaction by the viewer toward a photograph. “*Studium*” does not mean study, but rather “application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, but without special acuity” (Barthes, p. 26). “It is culturally that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions” (Barthes, p. 26). The *studium*’s “functions are to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause to signify, to provoke desire. And I, the Spectator, recognize them with more or less pleasure: I invest them with my *studium* (which is never my delight or pain)” (Barthes, p. 26).

Secondly, he refers to an element in certain photographs, which “rises from the

scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (Barthes, p. 26). “*Punctum* is a “sting, speck, cut, little hole, and also a cast of the dice. A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (Barthes, p. 27). “It allows me to accede to an infra-knowledge; it supplies me with a collection of partial objects and can flatter a certain fetishism of mine: for this “me” which likes knowledge, which nourishes a kind of amorous preference for it” (Barthes, p. 30). Barthes refers to these features as “biographemes”: “Photography has the same relation to History that the biographeme has to biography” (Barthes, p. 30).

Barthes refers to the “unary” nature of certain photographs. “In generative grammar, a transformation is unary if, through it, a single series is generated by the base: such are the passive, negative, interrogative, and emphatic transformations. The photograph is unary when it emphatically transforms “reality” without doubling it, without making it vacillate (emphasis is a power of cohesion): no duality, no indirection, no disturbance” (Barthes, p. 41). For Barthes, “photography, the presence of a thing (at a certain past moment) is never metaphoric; and in the case of animated beings, their life as well, except in the case of photographing corpses” (Barthes, p. 79). This point is so crucial to this study that I quote his rationale in full:

“If the photograph (of the cadaver) then becomes horrible, it is

because it certifies, so to speak, that the corpse is alive, as corpse:

it is the living image of a dead thing. For the photograph’s

Immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion

between two concepts: the Real and the Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past (“this-has-been”), the photograph suggests that it is already dead. Hence, it would be better to say that Photography’s inimitable feature (its *noeme*) is that someone has seen the referent (even if it is a matter of objects) in *flesh and blood*, or again *in person*.

Photography, moreover, began, historically, as an art of the Person: an identity, of civil status, of what we might call, in all senses of the term, the body’s *formality*”

(Barthes, p. 79).

Carmen used my photograph as a vehicle for self-study. She made mention of

psychoanalysis “as tutorial,” as a means toward liberatory praxis. Her sentiments are seconded by Krishnamurti’s injunction that “the mind is the result of time, the result of the reaction of a thousand years and of yesterday, of a second ago and ten years ago; the mind is the result of the period in which you have learnt and suffered and of all the influences of the past and present” (p. 184). If art is to serve as a tool in the construction (and subsequent deconstruction) of sign and symbol, then “this total process of the mind is to be understood only in relationship-- relationship with nature, with people, with our own projection, with everything. In fact, life is nothing but relationship” (Krishnamurti, p. 143).

I have become more increasingly aware throughout this study that “any form of conformity, imitation, according to a pattern, a mold, does not allow free inquiry” (Krishnamurti, p. 182). A reaction to imagery must be recognized for its contextual value, wrapped up as it is in the sociocultural blanket we either inherit and / or begin to construct from birth. Our semiotic response, i.e. “every thought, every feeling, every action is conformative, conditioned, influenced” (Krishnamurti, p. 183).

In many respects, the movement away from realism to forms of abstract art in the third quarter of the nineteenth century disengaged many people from the experience of immersing themselves *with* art. As Sam noted, under some circumstances abstraction became too much to bear, and meaning was lost. Impressionism, and later cubism, led to movements in total abstraction. The everyday citizen had, in Sam’s words, “no place to hang their philosophical hat.” Photography, in a sense, offers an olive branch to those individuals who feel disconnected to the world of art. Virtually anyone can make an attempt to ‘analyze’ a photograph. A photo is concrete, recognizable, and sensical. Given that

premise, photography as an art form can serve as a tutorial. Ultimately, a tool such as a photograph can conceivably lead to some measure of transformation, as a vehicle for transubstantiation, in the Vygotskian sense.

The key seems to be in the approach, for as Krishnamurti says, “there is a sense of freedom which is not from anything, which has no cause, but which is a state of being free” (p. 185). The type of effort put forth by my participants indicates full engagement on the part of each viewer, which entailed a deep, penetrating voyage inward. Each participant recognized an opportunity for personal growth, and from that understanding came a dialogue that provided great meaning for each of us. I believe we three would agree that “freedom is complete in itself, it is not a reaction, it is not an ideological conclusion” (Krishnamurti, p. 191), but rather a tenuous understanding of the dynamics of change. In order for me to fully appreciate the value of my participants’ efforts, I needed to engage myself in empathetic union with my informants, yet attempt to suspend my predilections until my moment of analysis. In order to traverse this tightrope, “to have insight, you have to listen, to let go and listen” (Krishnamurti, p. 200). In the end, Krishnamurti reminded his listeners “things have no value in themselves. It has the value you give it” (p. 173). It is my hope that this study has value for the reader.

CHAPTER SIX:
TOWARD A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF MICROHISTORICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC
TECHNIQUE

From the opening remarks in my preface to my final thoughts in this section, I have
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made a concerted effort to braid together the relationship between individuals' understandings with those movements that constitute the overriding concerns of researchers in the field. In this regard, certain commonalities and disconnections must be identified. I feel it is worthwhile to examine the bound relationship between micro and macro histories if we are to gain new understandings arising from the hermeneutics of this study. The insights of each individual appearing in this dissertation cannot be extracted from the sociocultural *zeitgeist* from which they are derived.

Modernist Photo Image- Theory in Review

By the turn of the twentieth century, the concept of formalism was a widely held and much respected edict that served to dictate the standards by which 'quality' art was judged throughout western art educational circles (Hutchens and Suggs, 1997, p. 8). Kantian principals of "disinterested perception" held sway as the basis for aesthetic judgment. Critique was to "be neither personal nor relative" (Barrett, 1993, p. 13). By suppressing emotion and accentuating intellectual prowess, a well-trained critic was said to hold credentials capable of developing a qualified judgment of art, based on universal principles of beauty, form, and process (Hutchens and Suggs, 1997).

Despite persuasive arguments for the inclusion of the creative process as a sound rationale for evaluation as proposed by Dow (1899) and Lowenfeld (1952), formalism continued to find widespread support in the United States throughout the first half of the

twentieth century (Hutchens and Suggs, 1997). Art critic, historian and educator Clement Greenberg's influence as a formalist and modernist shaped public opinion throughout the 1940's and 1950's, and formalism continued to be an extremely influential factor in critique throughout the third quarter of the century (Hutchens and Suggs, 1997, p. 8).

Greenbergian analysis became the standard operational mode for interpreting non-representational art in the 1960's, as "formalism became the basis of abstraction, the pursuit of form capable of evoking universal aesthetic experience" (Hutchens and Suggs, 1997, p. 8). In this regard, throughout the short-lived "cultural revolution" of the 1960's and into the 1970's, two highly visible art critics, Fry and Bell, continued to tout "significant form in a detached state" as the rule of thumb for critical analysis (Bell, 1973, p. 228).

Developments in Image Theory Critique

As the last quarter of the twentieth century emerged, translations of early works by Vygotsky and other such visionaries, served as precursors to postmodern thought (McRorie, in Hutchens and Suggs, 1992, p. 107). As Danto notes, Greenbergian formalism became regarded as "too narrow" to arrive at how art achieves meaning (Danto, 1981). Subject and content finally began to override concerns for form and process on a more significant level throughout art educational circles, as the newly coined term "postmodernism" began to reflect the "economic, political, social, and cultural factors inscribed upon it" (Hutchens and Suggs, 1997, p. 7). The "hegemony of modernism" promoted through standard-issue art

criticism (Hutchens and Suggs, 1992, p. 10) turned instead to a concern for “environmental responsibility” (Gablick, 1991), and a newly reformed recognition of “multiculturalism and parallel cultures” (Lippard, 1990).

Through this shift in the early 1970’s, a budding, unstable, postmodern movement served as a viable framework that found value in an “eclecticism of the art world”, while referencing individual and group experiences particularized by class, race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation that questioned the aesthetic “as the end of art” (Hutchens and Suggs, 1997, p. 14). This new emphasis then led to fresh definitions of ‘quality’ (as previously understood in the Greenbergian sense) -- now being redefined by the “heterogeneity of multiple voices” representing a new basis for critique (Hutchens and Suggs, 1997, p. 14). Modernism as a vehicle for hegemonic malpractice came to be regarded by some critics as blight-- giving rise to the notion that cultural monopoly is “never a harmless experience” (Ricoeur, 1965, p. 278). Rather, multicultural and sociocultural theorists saw in postmodernism a “pluralism of human possibility (and an) evident workability of numerous belief systems” (Dissanayake, 1988, p. 199).

It was within this process of de-centering that photography came to the forefront as a key medium in postmodern expression. “Quality”, as previously defined through Cartesian / Kantian formulaic convention became a “compromised term that reveals the biases of a Western, patriarchal, heterosexual art establishment” (Hutchens and Suggs, 1997, p. 11), and the camera was instrumental in chronicling this process. Photography had, however, not gone unscathed during this transitional process of artistic upheaval. As “form and media become incidental-- evidenced by appropriation and recycling of image”, the subversive uses

of photography have come under attack by the late-modernist faithful (Hutchens and Suggs, 1997, p. 11).

Barrett (in Hutchens and Suggs, 1997, p. 28) noted that Lippard (1988, p. 184) has railed against the persistent claims of modernists that postmodern art forms, such as photography, are often simply “literary art” laden with “political intentions”. Lippard states that critics and artists still influenced by modernism are likely to denigrate social art as “too obvious, heavy handed, crowd pleasing, and sloganeering” (1988, p. 184).

Walking Stick (1992, p. 15) insists that modernism, born of neo-liberalism, has promoted nomenclature such as “tribal art”, “crafts”, “folk art”, and “fine art”, which foster “cultural otherness and is an acquiescence to modern aesthetic ideologies that value certain media more than others” (Rushing, 1992). Additionally, May (1992) seeks a critique that “keeps things open to demystify the realities we create”, while West (in Golden, 1993, p. 27) is interested in postmodernism’s concern with issues of “extermination, empire, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, nation, nature, and region.”

Pearse (1992, p. 249) notes that while the modernist artists viewed themselves as a “productive inventor”, the postmodern creatist is more inclined to see her / himself as a bricoleur or collagist “who finds and arranges fragments of meaning” (Barrett, 1997, p. 28). Pearse adds that this method of artistic production is much like the “postman delivering multiple images and signs which he has not created, and over which he has no control” (1992, p. 249). Pearse’s viewpoint highlights an important shift of artist from authoritative dispenser of fact and truth to messenger of unfixed and de-centered semiotic imagery.

Innovations in Image Theory

Crimp (1990) offers a slightly different slant to the 'demise' of modernism. He contends that the invention of photography was chiefly responsible for the modernists' downfall, brought about by the mechanical reproduction of images (Crimp in Barrett, 1997, p. 24). Through this process, there occurred a "stripping away from the work of art of its properties of uniqueness, originality, and location or place of origin" (Barrett, 1997, p. 24). Barrett informs us of Crimp's concern that any given photo be "made in any place in the world at any time and can now be seen over and over again in a myriad of contexts" (Barrett, 1997, p. 24). This particular stance has direct bearing on how one views any photographic imagery offered in this case study.

Such concerns about photography are not new to postmodernism, but rather were addressed by Benjamin in the 1930's, following shortly behind the release of Vygotsky's work involving his innovative theories concerning the psychology of art. A member of the Frankfurt School, Benjamin, along with Adorno, Marcuse, and other European scholars fleeing Hitler, developed critical theory, which challenged dominant capitalist ideology (Barrett, 1997, p. 24). Barrett states that while traditional Marxists accepted the modernists' search for foundational truths, they rejected the modernists' separation of art from life (1997, p. 24). The neo-Marxist movement rejected this more traditional notion of "a strict and unwavering historical determinism" and its resulting predictability of the downfall of capitalism, preferring instead to accept that "culture influences history and that people can

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affect the future” (Barrett, 1997, p. 25).

This ability to influence the outcome of history then led postmodernists to view the chronicling of history as stories or “discourses fabricated by people” (Derrida referenced in Barrett, 1997, p. 25). This braiding of mixed media (i.e. photography with text), coupled with the destabilizing nature of radical relativism, served to unnerve ardent positivists and, in some cases, tip the balance of art critique in favor of a reliance upon and acceptance of profound uncertainty and paradigmatic flux.

Catharsis as an Interpretive Methodology

Transubstantiation in Catholic mass is the process by which the priest performs ceremonies in which the bread and wine of the sacrament are transformed into the flesh and blood of Christ, and then consumed by the faithful. In order to commune with their Savior, this act requires a transcendence of ordinary experience into that requiring a “leap of faith” in the Kierkegaardian sense (Collinson, 1987). Apparently, this ‘leap’ involves the employment of faculties above and beyond ordinary sense perception or conventional intellectual processing.

Vygotsky appropriated the term *transubstantiation* in his attempts to convey the reactive principle of recreatist (viewer) in relationship to that which is viewed-- the artwork. Certainly, Vygotsky had no intention of equating an artistic response with traditional forms of religious worship, but he no doubt considered the emotive nature of aesthetic response to

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be, in some way, akin to that experienced by the priesthood. Similarities include the processes through which an individual uses her / his core experiences as a filter with which to accommodate new cathartic understandings into an existentially personalized shift in consciousness (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1986).

In the Vygotskian mode, this reorganization of 'being' is facilitated by the dialectical process, which in turn offers a new paradigm with which to arrive at a new, more informed understanding of a given concept. It is this Vygotskian conceptualization of the process of dialectical change in one's persona that stands as a driving force in the rationale for the case study illustrated herein.

Semiosis as a Multi-Modal Investigative System

Involving the symbolic use of words, images, gestures, sounds and objects, the science of *semeiotikon* or "art of the signs" originally served as one of the foundational branches of medicine practiced in ancient Greece (Bouissac, 1998; Chandler, 1999). Through years of development and refinement, the field of semiotics has emerged as a potentially unifying factor within the meta-disciplines of science, while assisting in the formation of scientific inquiry as a cohesive unit (Kevelson, 1986). In its more recent configuration, semiotics has come to be viewed as a science that studies the "life of signs with society" due to a codification by its re-discoverer Saussure (1857-1913) (Saussure in Innis, 1986, p. 34-5). Saussure's life span coincided with the proliferation of the camera as

an agent for historical recording and analysis.

The professional lives of Saussure and his elder contemporary, Peirce (1839-1914) ran concurrent with the peak of modern industrialism in Europe and the United States. Early efforts in photojournalism came to reflect a sociological interest in class structure, as a shift in populations seeking urban employment signaled significant demographic change in this country. This shift from rural life to urban epicenters produced a plethora of material for semioticians. Whereas Saussure had concerned himself with theories of production and interpretation of meaning, Peirce concentrated on aspects of semiotics that were largely philosophical in nature (Lemke, 1999). Always rather far-reaching in the breath and scope of its application, semiotics (through the work of Peirce), moved toward understandings formulated through reasoning and logic derived from symbols, signals, and signs related to the natural sciences (Lemke, 1999).

Spring-boarding off the work of Peirce, Morris (1901-1979) extended the boundaries of semiotics to include a generalized theory of sign systems, their comparative analysis, and a resulting classification within the framework of society (Sebeok & Umiker-Sebeok, 1986, p. ix). Morris' efforts resulted in the identification of three distinct features of semiotics: i) meaning of signs themselves, ii) syntactics to describe structural relations, and iii) pragmatics as a means of interpretation (Lemke, 1999). In doing so, Morris came to view these three areas of semiotic analysis to exist as forms of text-- not the least among them photographic imagery.

As is the case of many tools and procedures for academically oriented, investigative fieldwork, the camera fell out of vogue as a prime force in conventional historical research.

Within three decades of the turn of the twentieth century, photography had reached its saturation point in terms of novelty among academicians, but had continued as a popular implement in the hands of the 'lay' person. It was in the 1930's that Kodak coined the phrase, "Just shoot and we'll do the rest", which underscored not only the camera's technological advances but also its easier availability for mainstream applications.

After a brief lull in academic circles, photography as a tool during research was revived, in part, by the controversial work of Mead. Her groundbreaking findings in anthropological field studies during the heart of the twentieth century revolutionized how various populations were viewed through an investigative lens (Mead, 1962). Mead's research methodology greatly influenced the new historicism, as well as sociology and the cognitive sciences (Chandler, 1999). Sebeok (1986) notes that her efforts resulted in the semiotic classification of three sub-domains: i) anthroposemiotics, the interactive relationship between sign and symbol and human activity, ii) zoosemiotics, the effect of sign and symbol in the activities of animals, and iii) endosemiotics, involving the internal information coding and transmission within the body (Chandler, 1999).

The Growth of Semiosis as Sociocultural Theory

Mead's iconoclastic endeavors broke ground for a third generation of semioticians, typified by the work of Hall, who sought investigative methodologies in which sign systems were physically and semiotically integrated with cultural artifacts (Chandler, 1999; Lemke,

1999). As a meta-discipline, semiotics expanded to include sociocultural theory under its umbrella of influence (Wertsch, 1998). This dual role of semiotics as a socioculturally relevant mode of research came to emphasize the interconnectedness of hermeneutic behaviors, systems, and the experiences of humans (Vygotsky, 1986). Neo-Vygotskian theorists' explorations in the mediational aspect of sociocultural theory further expanded the notion of meaning making as a sociolinguistic process (Fisk & Hartley, 1978; Lemke, 1999; Wertsch, 1991; Cole, 1996).

The repression of Vygotskian thought in Stalinist Russia severely impaired the spread of his innovative research. Decades later, a less oppressive regime under Khrushchev allowed for the dissemination of Vygotsky's work outside Russia. Unfortunately, hostile relations between the U.S.S.R. and the United States further delayed this process between 1956 and 1962. The relationship between sociocultural theory and the value of socially mediated understanding produced insights which directly affected new directions taken in art theory, anthropology, biology, cognitive psychology, linguistics, philosophy, etc. (Kevelson, 1986). Slowly, neo-Vygotskian scholars introduced novel perspectives, which have affected and bolstered the connection between meaning-making systems and their respective societies. Post-structuralist thought has thus provided new understandings within crucial, postmodern historical, political, and sociocultural contexts (John-Steiner, 1999).

As touched upon earlier, the semiotic aspects of sociocultural theory were rooted in Vygotsky's theory of catharsis (Vygotsky, 1925). This cathartic phenomenon is achieved through internalized thought processes, which must sort a vast quantity of stimuli (Van Oers, 1999; Vygotsky, 1925). Connery states that the "multi-model physiology of the body

renders the human species as agents capable of symbolic agency” (Connery, 2001; John-Steiner, 1995). It is through this semiotic process that individuals are engaged in activities that simplify, interpret, and categorize elements of lived reality (Sapir, 1971; Weir, 1985; Werner & Kaplan, 1963, in Van Oers, 1999).

Utilizing semiotic means is largely achieved through the dialectical transformation of decoded, recoded, and encoded information received from symbolic activities and artifacts (Connery, 2000; Van Oers, 1999; Lemke, 1999; Wertsch, 1991). Regarding this process, new knowledge is achieved using imagery as a vehicle for new understandings. As Vygotsky (1981) reminds us, imagery is a means-- not an end: “It’s the meaning that is important, not the sign. We can change the sign, but retain the meaning” (in Van Oers, 1991, p. 1).

The Sociopolitical History of the Sign

Peirce’s division of ‘sign’ into three classifications assists in our understanding of how visual imagery affects new understandings. Referential gestures, demonstratives, and personal pronouns are examples of Peirce’s first type of sign, *index* (Chandler, 1999). Sign as index, is limited in semiotic meaning, until it is fused with meaning through some form of causal relationship (Chandler, 1999).

Additional information aids the viewer in better understanding the photographic image-- exemplifying Peirce’s second type of sign, the *symbol* (Chandler, 1999). My
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photograph now has an extended meaning associated with the circumstances surrounding its creation and usage. Issues of national economic prioritization, caste considerations, political intrigue, population numbers, and a host of other factors change the semiotic meaning associated with my photograph. Much like ink markings on paper (index) are understood through their conversion into recognizable words (symbol), the significance of symbol refers to the governing principle or association between an object or entity and the perceived implications associated with its image (Chandler, 1999).

To place this mental activity within the scope of sociocultural theory, one can consider Peirce's injunction that 'index' is defined by referential and associational qualities that 'engage' an object on one hand, and the sensory and memory abilities of the interpretant on the other (Connery, 2000; Peirce, 1893, 1895, 1902, 1903; Smith, 2000). Association between an object and that which it represents (symbol), in Peircean terms, presupposes one's ability to imagine a representative object in the mind's eye, thereby associating the symbol with the image (Connery, 2000; Peirce, 1910). This brings into play the important notion that verbal or visual "language is not a copy but a symbol of reality" (Sapir, 1985, p. viiii, in Innis, 1985). Referring again to the image of the funeral pyre as a prime example, Volosinov saw signs as social forces involved in dialogical, ideological, and subjective, context-based processes (Connery, 2000; Innis, 1985).

This type of photographic imagery is often used to describe Peirce's third category of sign, the *icon* (Peirce, 1910; Innis, 1986). Religious iconography, for instance, provides a "direct, communicative link" with their interpretants as the icon signifies that which it portrays (Peirce, 1910, in Innis, 1986). Thus the use of a physical tool such as the camera to

capture the image of a cadaver (as icon) illustrates how utensils are externally directed to control outside processes in the material world (Kozulin, 1986; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

By the same token, there is a relationship between the photographer's physical tools and *psychological* tools-- those mental mechanizations that are internally directed and employed to control individual cognition and behavior (Kozulin, 1986; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). In this respect, image theory is supported by cognitive pluralism to explain the symbolic codification of information, understandings or meanings into visual, aural, kinesthetic, tactile, olfactory and verbal forms as "re-presented thought" (Chandler, 1999; Connery, 2000; John-Steiner, 1997, p. 4).

This correlation between image theory, sociocultural theory, and mediated, collaborative meaning-making help "sculpt" the forms within which they are engaged (Connery, 2000; Wertsch, 1991; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Mediation serve as a conduit between the imagery presented and its cultural meanings, and it is through such reflection that "extension of self beyond mind occurs" (Connery, 2000; Geertz, 1973). As such, semiosis can be defined as a social construct derived from the internalized understanding of external texts (Connery, 2000; Wertsch, 1998, p. 11-17).

Evolution of Collaborative Meaning-Making

During the 1940's and 1950's, the pioneering work by the French cinematographer, Jean Rouch, served as the prototype for ethnographic, image-based research (Henley, in
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Prosser, 1998, p. 46). Along with Flaherty and Vertov, Rouch broke new ground with what had emerged from his fellow cinematographers' work in Russia as a form of *kinopravda*, which came to be known as "*cinema verite*" (Henley, in Prosser, 1998, p. 46). This novel form of photographic 'absolutism' was soon modified to a methodology, which "captured life unaware" (Henley, in Prosser, 1998, p. 46). Shortly thereafter, Rouch renamed his work a "truth of everyday reality", and finally by the 1960s his work became a revised precursor to postmodern relativism referred to as "ethno-fiction" (Henley, in Prosser, 1998, p. 46).

This rapidly changing consideration of how to judge Rouch's approach flew in the face of conventional forms of standard research procedure. With ever increasing suspicion of the "old guard" as performing "salvage ethnography", Rouch's work served to expose the modernist viewpoint as one which "silently conspired to emphasize some idealized notion of the 'traditional' past" (Henley, in Prosser, 1998, p. 45). For anyone who has experienced the outer reaches of so-called 'third-world' countries, there is the stark realization that "once largely autonomous communities are developing hybrid cultural forms as a means of dealing with integration into a world economic and social system" (Clifford, 1986; Morris, 1994). Any notion of pure-form societies living in virtual isolation from western influence is, sadly, a thing of the past.

In order to place the evolutionary process of photographic ethnography into some historical and philosophical context, some backtracking to the days of classical positivism is in order. Henley notes, for instance, that with the rise in popularity of the camera as an investigative tool, visual data aimed "exclusively at documentation, i.e. the collection of visual data in the most objective possible manner" (Henley, in Prosser, 1998, p. 44).

A camera's usage was considered to be the anthropologist's version of the scientists' microscope, an instrument of pristine neutrality-- impersonal, dispassionate, and distant (Sorenson & Jablonko, 1995; Fuchs, 1988). The camera as utensil was variously described as a "window unmarked by the photographer's finger prints" (Winston in Prosser, 1998, p. 66), and photography as a "death mask"... "physically forced to correspond point by point to nature" (Peirce, 1965, p. 143-159).

By the third quarter of the twentieth century, this type of positivism came under closer scrutiny. Critics regarded such concepts as 'total objectivity' as "methodological philistinism", and they were quick to "abandon notions of aesthetics which are formed by the ethnocentric assumptions of the Euro-American art cult" (Gell, 1992, p. 42). Such reservations led to what has been described as a "representational crisis", pitting western positivists "against the world" (Henley in Prosser, 1998, p. 52). This 'crisis' centered around accusations that certain ethnographers were "pretending that indigenous people have 'voice', when they are actually 'bit players' in the self-interested western construction of the world" (Henley, in Prosser, 1998, p. 52, referring to Farris, 1992; Moore, 1994).

By the 1980s, ventures into the 'new' ethnography sought to structure fieldwork along a story line, while seeking to edit according to narrative conventions (Nichols, 1983; deBromhead, 1996). This required: "not distorting the material so much as using the medium to its best effect to evoke an understanding of the situations portrayed... (This was considered) no different... from ethnographic monographs which routinely call on ... conventions of textual representation to communicate their understandings" (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1995, p. 239-262).

For ethnographic filmmakers, the camera served as a catalyst, which provoked certain events, situations, and relationships “that are revealing precisely because of their atypicality”... and “therefore achieves an understanding that is inaccessible to those who insist on remaining neutral and distant” (Rouch, 1995, p. 89-90). It is this very process that serves to generate “revelatory epiphanies” (Denzin, 1989, p. 15-18).

After a lifetime of work in the field, Rouch combined his efforts with those of MacDougall and Young to further explore the construction of meaning, which resulted in a trio of articles collectively titled *Principles of Visual Anthropology* (Rouch, 1975; MacDougall, 1975; Young, 1975; MacDougall, 1978). In a division of duties, Rouch emphasized the role of the filmmaker as a provider of action, Young underscored the importance of allowing viewers enough latitude to construct their own personalized meanings, while MacDougall advocated for the importance of involving the protagonists in the construction of the meaning derived from the investigative effort (Henley in Prosser, 1998, p. 50).

A gradual shift toward collaborative forms of mediated meaning making entailed realigning emphasis away from a behaviorist and social structuralism, “undergirded by the goal of a “natural science of society” (Marcus & Fisher, 1986, p. 26). Instead, meanings, symbols, and language needed reconsideration, allowing that social life be “conceived as the negotiation of meanings” (Marcus & Fisher, 1986, p. 26). This process of ethnographic field work was then recognized as one that, from its inception, underwent an “editing stage” which was subject to “cultural bias, idiosyncratically personal factors of gender, age, relationship of the subject, political interest, aesthetic taste, and so on” (Henley in Prosser,

1998, p. 43). The very nature of transforming a three dimensional world into a two-dimensional artifact in the form of a photographic print, was indicative of procedures which altered any possible universal or objective perspective (Henley in Prosser, 1998, p. 42). Such considerations nullified any “claim upon the real” that might be implicit in an ethnographic document (Winston, 1995 in Prosser, 1998, p. 42).

Sekula (1986, p. 18) identified limitations of photography by emphasizing “an acute recognition of the “inadequacies” and limitations of ordinary empiricism”. Winston (in Prosser, 1998, p. 64) concurs, while noting that photography “offers, at best, partial evidence despite the richness of the data it presents”. This line of reasoning reflects the fact that “opportunities for manipulation are too great to allow a photograph to stand, of itself, as evidence of the external world” (Winston, in Prosser, 1998, p. 60). Like new forms of historicism, “instead of maintaining a single train of thought as in a linear textual medium”, interpretive ethnography will need to “establish a structure that allows for multiple points of access” (Seaman & Williams, 1992, p. 310). In order to move ethnographic film from documentary to document, Morphy (1994) suggests that the visual text be combined with written text in order to enrich the anthropological process-- likening the procedure to “sifting through field notes” (Henley, in Prosser, 1998, p. 54).

This consideration is seconded by Rabinger (1987, p. 57-68), who sees a distinct advantage in New Ethnographers’ predilections for combining a “particular range of techniques” to enhance the field project in question. An added incentive is to engage the viewer (the re-creativist, as neo-Vygotskians would say) to form new understandings through the benefits of cognitive pluralism, which would draw from multiple sensory processes.

Additionally, a crucial aspect of collaborative knowledge-building are the benefits of co-participation, cooperative learning, joint discovery, and the elevation of an existing knowledge-base-- all components of mediated, socially constructed understanding (John-Steiner, 2000).

Investigative procedure involving image-based research could be a less cumbersome process, freed from the rigidity of hierarchical, lock-step thinking reminiscent of science-based, ethnographic procedures. Image-based theory could then be expanded to embrace fluidity vital for fieldwork in an educational domain undergoing a transition-- reflective of a planet whose communications system is experiencing an unprecedented growth spurt. As a result of this frenzied expansion, informed media critics fear that technology has created an educational entity whose growing pains result from a cyber-body of electronic nerve impulses far outpacing the development of a healthy, ethical, and ideological 'central nervous system'. It could be argued that the New Historicist / Ethnographer, camera in hand, has the capacity to produce imagery that counterbalances, contradicts, or confirms popular mythologies produced through visual narratives.

In keeping with new understandings in research methodology, qualitative ethnographic theory is constructed recursively-- a series of connected ideas undergoing redefinition throughout the life of the study (Pelto & Pelto, 1978.) Initially, an emerging formative theory informs the researcher of rudimentary parameters derived from pre-existing information on the research community and topic, literature on the subject, the researcher's lived experience, popular media sources, and experiences of the local community, to include those of the principle respondents (Schensul, 1985).

Formative Theory as Methodology

Formative theory consists of an initial focus calling for organization of the inquiry (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 434). Glazer and Strauss (1967) refer to the building of formative theory as a dialectical process, while noting that the data collected is constantly compared with the initial model. The result is a modification of the original formative ethnographic theory en route to an anticipated “final” analysis (Glazer and Strauss, 1967.) Although this method eschews an *a priori* commitment to an indisputable Truth in need of re-verification, it does represent a model rich in potential for interpersonal exchange, thus providing potentially fertile ground for meaningful growth through community practice (Cajete, 1994.)

Pelto and Pelto (1978) state, “description and theory are not different kinds of social processes.” They insist that all description is theory because “it involves a selection and reorganization of observations of reality into a set of descriptions that seeks to predict future reality” (Schensul, 1999.) In more extensive, quantitative-based studies, concerns with generating local, substantive (Kaplan, 1964), or mid-range theories of culture (Merton, 1967), would lead to anticipated reliability resulting in expected re-applicability and perceived replicability in other locations.

Rather, modes of observation in this study will seek to serve as vehicles in the formation of *operationalizing concepts*-- propositions as statements of the interrelationship

of concepts, and *operationalizing theories* as systems of interrelated propositions (Schensul, 1999.) Findings derived from data collection procedures are likely to be highly site-specific, idiosyncratic, subjective, and time-sensitive-- underscoring the relativistic and tenuous nature of interpretive ethnography (Guba & Lincoln, 1995.) My study recognizes the development and deployment of a series of meaning-making systems through which mutual understandings, or for that matter, misunderstandings are ‘filtered’ by participants (Vygotsky, 1962.) Accordingly, findings are often revealed, analyzed and understood in unexpected ways (Denzin, 1989.) An examination of these socioculturally ideological filters is expected to be central to the concerns of this project, namely exploring avenues in route to deeper consideration of meaning-making processes (Luria, 1962).

Early stages of data collection build toward a local or mid-range theory (Carley, 1991; Stringer, 1996.) Initial stages of the modeling process include “emic” or popular views held by the local population, expressed in part through responses by participants (Carley, 1991). Schensul believes a *descriptive* approach, thought to be best suited for the early stages of data collection, will yield responses about the boundaries, characteristics, and component parts of a single domain (Schensul, Oodit, et al., 1994). As the research proceeded, I sought to know what connections link various domains (Schensul, Oodit, et al., 1994).

Dependent and Independent Domains

Once the descriptive data identified specific domains, an *associative* approach allowed for concern for which structures led to, or were influenced by other domains (Reed & Furman, 1992.) This system is often used in experimental and / or intervention approaches (Wilson, 1998; Stringer, 1996). While the creation of an intervention policy is not a main concern of this study, it proves useful for organizing and solidifying the relationship between successful data collection techniques and subsequent levels of quality during data analysis.

Models were designed to articulate domain relationships using the description, associative, and evaluative approaches to methodology in which transformative and relational terms such as *paradigm*, *structure*, *pattern*, *unit*, and *fact* could be used to describe such levels (Stringer, 1996.) The *evaluative* approach employs a more analogous set of terms (domain, factor, variable, and item) as basic building blocks for the development of theory (Schensul, 1999.)

Schensul (1999) specifically notes that the researcher should “understand and visualize the linkage” between varying levels, so as to “make appropriate transformations.” Further, interpretive ethnography, while fully capable of delivering “grounded theory” (Glazer & Strauss, 1967), should still be considered a process through which theory formation is a highly “complex matrix” capable of providing the following conceptual and cognitive options (Schensul, 1999):

* Moving horizontally from a single phenomenon to include related phenomena at the same level of complexity.

* Moving vertically (inductively) from lower to higher order concepts (from the top up.)

* Moving vertically (deductively) from higher to lower order concept (from the top down.)

The term, *dependent domain*, refers to a domain that changes in response to other domains, which is to suggest that a change in the dependent domain is caused by the *independent* domain (Schensul, 1999.) “Independent domains precede dependent domains in terms of presumed causality,” states Schensul (1999).

Mediating Domains

Mediating domains modify the normal or direct relationship between independent and dependent domains (Schensul, 1999.) A predictive relationship between the two domain types is described as “direct” (Schensul, 1999). In this respect, the mediating activity in data collection and analysis leads to inferences and a resulting series of hypotheses to be deconstructed through tracing the *inverse* relationship between the dependent and independent domains.

The long, arduous struggle to gain legitimacy in qualitative study culminated in a few small victories throughout the 1960s. These successes were due to pioneering work in the field by a handful of cinematographers, field anthropologists, and renegade sociologists during the 1940's and 1950's. By the 1970s and 1980s, an emerging band of writers, dubbed postmodernists, began to explore the hegemonic superstructure that prevented headway in presenting to entrenched, academic enclaves the possibility of new and innovative methodologies (Waugh, 1992). A powerful, patriarchal circle of academicians clung to long-held traditions of scientific inquiry that had been influenced by Enlightenment thought (Waugh, 1992).

Wrestling With Essentialist Image Theory

Positivist standards were thought to present data in an objective, controlled manner devoid of emotive or aesthetic hindrances. An ongoing debate between art and science regarding their relative value as an educative instrument had been argued since Plato's time. Science ultimately won the popularity battle during the eighteenth century (Collinson, 1987). Unquestionably, science and technology dominate our present age of discovery, while stunted programs in literary and fine arts struggle for even the most basic funding and support.

In recent decades, exploration of outer space and dramatic advances in medicine, warfare, and communications have revolutionized the way modern civilizations have viewed

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scientific inquiry. Since the Sputnik era, investigations into behavioralism and structuralism have dominated procedures of inquiry and any attempt to introduce a more human element into scholastic study has been met with stiff resistance.

The Rebel Avant Guard

Among those most often singled out by the established voices of academia for their literary transgressions are Nietzsche, Marx, Heidegger, Freud, Wittgenstein, and more recently Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, Baudrillard, and Lyotard (Farberman, 1991, p. 475-6; Prus, 1996, p. 218). These writers were among the more notable of a fast-growing legion of instigators determined to subvert cherished, privileged norms. During the 1980s, a group of French writers led by Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray advocated for lesbian and / or eco-feminists' civil rights. They led a charge to break the stronghold of institutionalized, positivistic approaches of academic study associated with patriarchic forms of hegemonic totalitarianism (Weedon, 1987; Waugh, 1992).

The last fifty year's movement away from traditional forms of research has been built upon the foundation laid in the previous century to what is now called the Postmodern Era. Modernism, a phenomenon generally associated with the Industrial Revolution, presented an atmosphere within which semioticians like Saussure, Peirce, and Watson sought to explore new understandings regarding sign and symbol (Lemke, 1999). It was through this reconsideration of the world around them that forward-thinking social scientists began to

delve into new methodological options. It was also during this reexamination process that the development of both literary and visual forms of narrative served to forge a tighter bond between these two disciplines (Prosser, 1998).

Evolution of Visual and Literary Historicism

Difficulties encountered in both visual and literary historicism were substantial. As sociocultural and feminist theory began to take root, research methodology became a “contentious field, deeply divided between those searching for universal features of the mind, and those who see human activity grounded in historical and cultural experiences” (John-Steiner, 1995).

Just as photographic fieldwork moved “from elitist to ‘democratization’ of camera ownership” (Cronin in Prosser, 1998, p. 69), so did multi-modal narrative innovations offer “an interpretative framework for understanding ethnographies’ multiple places in tele-visual societies” (Lincoln, 1995, p. 40). These ‘multiple places’ led to no one theory, but rather a multiplicity of micro-theories, which in turn were rarely supported by empirical evidence (Burgin, 1982; Cronin in Prosser, 1988, p. 70). This situation indicated that photography had generally been under-theorized, indicative of a certain disregard for psychological aspects of material culture (Dittmar, 1992). As a result, Image and Narrative theory have been forcefully challenged by realist ethnographers. Those who dared to become ‘transgressors’, in Denzin’s (1997, p. 251) words, were “policed, punished, mocked, and

even ridiculed” (Farberman, 1991, p. 475, 1992; Kleinman, 1993; Kunda, 1993, Lofland, 1993).

The Essentialists’ Critique of Postmodern Thought

Such harassment was in reaction to the perception that New Historians were threatening the very essence of science itself, through their insistence upon the inclusion of ethno-poetics, self-narratives, New Journalism, performance and standpoint texts, poems, mysteries and other non-traditional forms of expression (Clough, 1995; Prus, 1996, p. 227; Shelton, 1995b). Effort expended by the New Journalists in their attempts to implement and extend critical ethnography galled traditional social scientists. It was perceived that the ideological avant-guard was trying to force forms of participatory democracy, without advocating for particular solutions (Carspecken, 1996; Charity, 1995, p. 146).

Closed academic societies entrusted with the preservation of sociology and anthropology had long been built, one brick at a time, on foundations of canonized methodological procedures considered beyond impunity (Denzin, 1997). These methods were passed from generation to generation with reverence and aplomb, while retaining a certain “reliance on universal cognitive algo-rhythms” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 194). In terms of visual and literary investigative procedure, more acceptable, traditional approaches “had largely been anti-aesthetic and focused upon the technological and methodological” (Banks, in Prosser, 1998, p. 14). Levi-Strauss (1968, p. 134) noted that social organization was “too

complex to be formalized by means of a single model". Thus, a less linear, more lateral methodology was sought.

Photo Image Theory: The New Research Question

With the expansion of methodological techniques, including those created by "laypersons" outside formal academic circles, challenges were made concerning scholastic, "taken-for-granted myths" (Cronin, in Prosser, 1998, p. 70). Consequently, there began to develop a "necessary stage for the formulation and investigation of valid research questions" (Cronin, in Prosser, 1998, p. 70). More expansive conceptions of what constituted 'valid' research then paved the way for feminist, communitarian, and certain 'moral / ethical' ethnographies to come to the forefront (Ryan, 1995; Christians, 1995a, 1995b; Craig, 1995; Rosen, 1994).

Introduction of subjective forms of ethics, based on the premise that there are "no socially neutral technologies", eroded the notion that image-based research or indeed any research at all, could remain unbiased (Baudry, 1970, p. 534; Banks, in Prosser, 1998, p. 17). Moreover, the methodological technique, device, or form was no longer considered an end in itself, for "it requires meaning and significance in relation" to the overall task or assignment (Vygotsky, 1922, p. 58). This shift in perspective, from ironclad suppositions of truth to epistemological relativity in relationship to lived experience, serves as a cornerstone of postmodern conceptions of sociocultural theory. Thirty years after their initial differences

were delineated positivist and relativist proponents continue to battle one another over lines of ideological demarcation. These claims and counter-claims have resulted in a firestorm of critique in the dawn of our new millennium.

Photo Image Theory: The Relativists' Stance

The shortcomings of cognitive monism include a critique of a system that “lacks the lived-in qualities of intimacy, engagement, conflict, and negotiation” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 195). Harkening back to Cartesian dualism, John-Steiner fears that positivism “resembles other analytical dichotomies separating interrelated human experiences, such as the separation of thinking from feeling, or the individual from the social” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 195).

Traweek (1988) concurs, adding that such traditional research practices “long passionately for a world without loose ends, without temperament, gender or nationalism... and (instead seek) extreme cultures of objectivity” (Traweek, in John-Steiner, 2000, p. 99). Further, Denzin (1997) claims that positivism ‘valorizes’ one approach to truth and science, with a tendency to strip research of its context. Such practice often engineers an exclusion of deeper meanings. The research is then unable to negotiate the etic / emic dilemma, failing to relate general data to specific cases, and has a tendency to emphasize verification over discovery (Denzin, 1997, p. 255).

Micro historical Image Theory: The Positivists' Rebuttal

Positivists, however, are quick to rebut what they consider the “death knell” of ethnography (Snow & Morrill. 1995b, p. 362). The Postmodernists’ proclivity for using ethnography as a platform for moral, political, or social criticism has been regarded to be bad practice:

“It is our view that there is little to be gained and much to be lost by making moral claims and engaging in moral posturing. It is far better to jettison such impulses and focus on the question of how best to describe and interpret the experiences of other people and other cultures” (Snow & Morrill. 1995b, p. 362).

Snow and Morrill’s notion of an unequivocal “interpretation of the experiences of other people” seems highly problematic in its implication of embedded points of view rendering a possible judgment. This stance is the essence of positivism-- the belief that diverse cultures can be understood by employing a western, one-size-fits-all method of inquiry and analysis to produce ironclad truisms from a detached sense of unfounded certainty. Positivists would argue that detached observation is not only possible but also a preferred method of analysis.

Huber (1995), Prus (1996), and Farberman (1991, 1992), see other shortcomings in the relativists’ approach. Their objections include the following statements:

- 1.) The new writing is not scientific; therefore, it cannot be part of the scientific
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project.

- 2.) The new writers are moralists, and moral judgments are not part of science.
- 3.) The new writers have a faulty epistemology; they do not believe in disinterested observers who study a reality that is independent of human action.
- 4.) The new writing uses fiction: This is not science. It is art.
- 5.) The new writers do not study lived experience, which is the true province of ethnography. Hence, the new writers are not participant observers.
- 6.) The new writers are postmodernists, and this is irrational because postmodernism is fatalistic, nativistic, radical, absurd, and nihilistic (Denzin, 1997, p. 264).

In stark contrast to these alleged forms of educational malpractice, positivists seek a “realist regime (that) holds to the belief in form and steady truths about the world. Truths are based on the ocular, visual model of verification” (Denzin, 1997, p. 265). These systems of verification are actualized through the “twin banners” of universality and functionalism (Dickens, 1995, p. 539), although as Denzin laments, this stern, unwavering attempt at objectivity is highly suspect. Denzin (1997, p. 265) states that “these regimes use validity and reliability as marketing devices, obscuring the fact that the observer is not a neutral spectator; truth is always a function of the visual regime that is deployed.”

Investigative Methodology: An Ongoing Debate

It is this very issue of how multi-modal forms of narrative can be interpreted that continues to surface in the research methodology. The ideological undercurrent supporting each individual's belief system influences interpretations. When viewing an image or a text, one will naturally transact that artifact with schema derived from personal experience. These experiences and schematic paradigms collectively form personal literacy or myths, which each individual understands as 'reality'. Novel imagery and text continually provide opportunities for transformation through dialectical processes. However, such opportunities for cognitive reconfiguration remain ultimately subordinate to one's own ability to recognize the structural and de-constructed nature of image and text. Two examples of this phenomenon, chosen from image theory, are illustrated below.

Photo Imagery: Realist Myth v. Symbolist Myth

Banks notes that, despite ample evidence to the contrary, the assumption remains that visual imagery produced through photography and filmmaking "apparently capture(s) reality unproblematically" (Banks, in Prosser, 1998, p. 15). This persistent notion that photographic imagery serves as a "mirror of reality" illustrates the "binary folklore" examined and classified by image theorists as "realist myth(s)" or "symbolist myth(s)" (Sekula, 1986, p. 18). For Winston, this understanding indicates, "photography offers at best partial evidence despite the richness of the data it presents" (Winston, in Prosser, 1998, p. 64). This

sentiment was echoed by Vial, who took issue with empirical support for the realist myth evidenced in studies by Beilin and Rose involving children's responses to visual imagery (Beilin & Rose, 1981). Vial found that when the referent is instantly recognizable, the viewer "runs the risk of taking the representation for the referent, i.e., treating the photograph as true" (Winston in Prosser, 1998, p. 15, paraphrasing Vial, 1988).

Sontag (1977, p. 5) defends this realist position by noting "photographs do not seem to be statements of the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire". Adopting a similar stance, O'Connell believes that "the image by its flatness and precision persuades us to accept the moment it portrays as the essential one" (Leon, 1981). The evidentiary power of photography is further purported by Sontag's claim that:

"the picture may distort, but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture. A photograph seems to have more innocence, and therefore more accurate relation to visible reality than do other mimetic objects" (Sontag, 1977, p. 5).

Schwartz summarizes this view in the following manner: "Both history and popular lore have encouraged us to view photographs as direct, unmediated transcriptions of the real world, rather than seeing them as coded symbolic artifacts whose form and content transmit identifiable points of view (1992, p. 95)."

One might be more sympathetic to Sontag's point of view after noting that her writings occurred before the proliferation of technological innovations in cinematic

production that now offers convincing alterations of reality. This consideration is tempered, however, by the understanding that photography, since its inception, has created and used illusion as a theatrical device (example: the undisclosed, staged re-enactment of the planting of the flag at Iwo Jima-- a falsification designed to serve as political propaganda).

Instances of such deceptive film technique underscore the “rhetorical battle” regarding *how* the process of constructing meaning occurs within the interactional context in which the image is created and viewed (Beloff, 1993). It also signals a shift away from formalist, analytical dependencies involving functionalism and structuralism toward a more phenomenological perspective rooted in representational ethnography (Banks, in Prosser, 1998, p. 9). It would therefore seem logical that neither the symbolist nor the realist myth should be entirely trusted, given the media’s current practice of image manipulation. Winston echoes this sentiment, by stating that one should consider “moving the legitimacy of the realist image from ‘representation’-- the screen or the print-- where nothing can be guaranteed, to ‘reception’-- by the audience or the viewer-- where nothing *need* be guaranteed” (Winston, in Prosser, 1998, p. 66) (author’s emphasis).

If, according to Prosser’s claims, this crisis raises issues of ‘representation’, ‘trustworthiness’, ‘interpretation’, and ‘reflexivity’, then Lesy (1980) offers a third paradigm. Lesy (1980) suggests that visual / literary narrative may take several different approaches. Some narratives are linked to the reality that lies behind the images, so that the photographs and the narrative are related, as illustration is to text. Some narratives may focus more explicitly on the photograph itself. In other words, they “directly address the photographic image rather than the reality which underlies the image” (Lesy, 1980,

paraphrased by Cronin, 1998, p. 76).

Photographic Imagery: The Role of Semiotics

When applied to investigative methodologies, Lesy's relativistic approach illustrates Guba and Lincoln's observation that "gone (are) the beliefs in ontological realism, objective epistemologies, and use of quantitative methods to verify hypothesis" (1994, p. 114). These beliefs can be replaced through emphasis on the appropriation of semiotic tools and means that play a central role in the socialization processes of meaning-making (John-Steiner, 1996). Attempts, by formalists, to construct theories outside the primary foundations built by sociological and psychological processes are considered problematic by Vygotsky and others (Vygotsky, 1922, p. 56). Visual systems, television, computers, magazines, and billboards employ culturally embedded technologies. These technologies require semiotic processing. Use of visual analysis strategies becomes amendable to anthropological study (Banks, in Prosser, 1998, p. 11).

It is also through these personal, subjective understanding of semiotic imagery-- written, visual or aural-- that positivists see a breakdown in the standards they are trying so desperately to uphold. While Fairthorne supports the New Ethnography by emphasizing that "actuality" is not a "fundamental property" of imagery, Formalists argue that 'so-called' postmodern ethnographers reduce human, lived experience either to personalized, textual 'reality' (Prus, 1996, p. 245), or to self-narratives (Snow & Morrill, 1995a, p. 347). While

positivists rely on methods that verify Truth, they are unwilling to accept as scientific data, forms of emotional intimacy, verisimilitude, shared experience, narrative truths, figurative and self-reflective use of language, multiple viewpoints, or the treatment of facts as social constructs (Denzin, 1997, p. 253). These concepts of an abstracted version of mind, interpreted as a meaning-making mechanism devoid of feeling and location within the parameters of life experience, worry interpretive ethnographers.

Sociopolitical Ramifications of Multi-Modal Narrative

Positivists argue that postmodern ethnographers offer no fixed, “intersubjectively constituted” place from which scientific truths can be launched (Prus, 1996, p. 223). For positivistic social scientists, the New Writers-- Foucault, Derrida and their colleagues-- offer a postmodern viewpoint that is “highly cynical, completely relativist, pervasively despairing, and intensely unscientific” (Prus, 1996, p. 218). In order to clarify any possible misunderstandings about the positivists’ position on these matters, Prus adds that relativist authors are also “radical, fatalistic, absurd, and nihilistic to the extreme” (Prus, 1996, p. 218).

Much of the discrepancy between the worldviews held by the two rivaling factions seems to revolve around the way observations are formulated about the ever-changing nature of global conditions. Denzin highlights specific features of the postmodern condition in this way:

The term postmodern... refers to several things at the same time: a movement in the arts; new forms of social theory; historical transformations that have occurred since World War II; cultural life under late capitalism; life in a mass-mediated world in which the symbol of reality (hyper reality) has replaced the real; and a conservative historical moment characterized by a backlash against the political activities of many marginalized voices and communities (racial minorities, gays, elderly, and women) (Denzin, 1997, p. 262).

Given this backdrop, events that occur under postmodern conditions bear little resemblance to the conditions of modernity that fostered the positivist position. It is becoming increasingly clear to proponents of the New Ethnography that “positivists’ fact / value distinction is no longer allow(able)” (Denzin, 1997, p. 272) in a world harnessed to and manipulated by capitalist zeal. Because the union between media and corporate control has reached a stage of crisis proportions, feminist (Ryan, 1995), standpoint (Smith, 1987), and postmodern (Benhabib, 1992) proponents challenge the position that accords a “privileged position to scientific knowledge” (Sjoberg, et al, 1995, p. 9). If this world has reached a state of monolithic politicized, as critics suggest, then a “discourse-based ethical model”, as proposed by Habermas and Benhabib, seems crucial to any hope for resuscitating democracy (Habermas, 1990, Benhabib, 1990, p. 340-350).

Discourse-oriented models indicate the necessity of a shift from a dogmatic, memorized creed to an open, more dynamic exchange of thoughts and feelings. The conversion of internal thought to a creative form of external speech has variously been

described as “thinking on the run”, and rather poetically, as “a crumpled telegram” (John-Steiner, 2001). Through this type of descriptive word usage, it becomes apparent that truly meaningful discourse is often rather unpredictably mediated by language and other symbol systems (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

This exchange of not only complimentary, but also often conflicting belief systems must, of necessity, take place in human, social contexts (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Interpersonal as well as intrapersonal understandings are best understood when contextualized within their historical development (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). These understandings often require resiliency indicative of a willingness to consider multiple perspectives. It would stand to reason that cemented ideologies dismissing discourse as superfluous to the educational process might be less able to recognize and correct possible shortcomings in their own edu-philosophical positionality.

Semiosis: A Communitarian Ethical Model

It is a less rigid, more dynamic style of discourse that presents an opportunity for the implementation of a “communitarian ethical model” (Denzin, 1995a, p. 215-217). This discursive methodology is based on an “interactive, post-pragmatist” approach (Denzin, 1995a, p. 215-217), which seems so crucial to community, self, and inquiry (Schrum, 1995). We are participating in an age inundated with cinematic, tele-visual imagery and mind-numbing, consumer-based info-mercialism. Communitarian ethics “move forward”

through shared meaning making in social situations (Behabib, 1992, p. 9), whereupon new “understandings, based on shared emotional experiences, and not consensus” (Denzin, 1984, p. 145) are nurtured through a respect for the benefits of diverse opinion. Denzin further describes the basis for communitarian discourse, by noting that this post-pragmatic system situates the interactive, moral self with the decisive contexts of gender, sexual orientation, race, class, ethnicity, religion, and nationality (Denzin, 1997, p. 277).

Interpretive photographers / ethnographers strongly suggest that such variance among educational settings and orientations would be poorly served by a totalizing ideology, born of a single, positivist model. Using feminist communitarian research as an example, Christians (1993) notes that this particular visual and literary framework has strongly indicated its ability to “provoke transformations and changes in public and private spheres of everyday life” by addressing conditions of oppression (Christians, et al, 1993, p. 194-5; Lincoln, 1995b, p. 277). In order to reformulate the existing superstructure that dictates educational policy, Lincoln calls for a “sacred conception of science” that “honors the ecological as well as the human” (Lincoln, 1995b, p. 284). It is this relocation of humankind within a much larger, interrelated, and multi-dimensional process of a cooperative global existence that would require the acknowledgment of an ideology that “stresses human dignity, care, justice, and interpersonal respect” (Lincoln, 1995b, p. 284).

In order to accomplish this daunting task, a more equitable, re-educational process would “require new conceptions of truth, the public, science journalism, self, and community” (Wiley, 1995, paraphrased by Denzin, 1997, p. 274). Seemingly, emphasis placed on this pressing issue will increase dramatically as global, diasporic populations

continue to recast ideological mythologies in a new, post-positivist light.

Personal Reflections on the Educational Value of Multi-Modal Narratives

This study has primarily concentrated on the growth, development, and influence of visual imagery as exemplified by the use of the camera as a tool in the semiotic process by which we create new meanings in our daily lives. I've made an effort to illustrate the relationship between visual and literary imagery as a complimentary set of approaches, which can be combined to form a vehicle for creating novel understandings of our private and public environment, and our places in it.

Additionally, it has been the intention of this work to explore some of the more basic premises of sociocultural theory to help locate the mechanics and dynamics of individual meaning making within the larger contexts of social life in a pluralistic society. To do so, an overview of semiotics was outlined in an attempt to illustrate how the effects of sign and symbol are influential in our own intellectual, emotional, and creative growth.

Photo-Ethnography as Transformative Discourse

We all live in a world experiencing the results of competing ideologies in a rapidly changing environment-- a global society that will either adapt according to the dictates of

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necessity, or suffer unthinkable consequences. It is with positive expectations that these challenges must be met and defused. In this effort, any notion that ‘might makes right’ might better be replaced with cooperative, co-constructed understandings based on proactive policies. But how can these ‘lofty platitudes of hope’ be realized? Wishful thinking and speculative verbiage are surely not enough.

Truly transformative discourse seems crucial to the realization of this goal. It has been argued in this dissertation that multi-modal forms of narrative are useful avenues for building new lines of communication. In this respect, terms such as the New Writers, New Historicism, or New Ethnographers are not simply catch phrases designed to legitimize a writer’s fancy. They refer instead to procedures designed to recalculate systems that lead to new understandings-- understandings that are vital to the future of our social well being.

The educational belief system of traditional, positivistic scientific inquiry has been presented as a standard that has enjoyed a position of prominence in western societies for a substantial length of time. Its longevity has been the result of a widespread ideology dating back to the ancient Greek tradition, which then found its full expression during the Enlightenment period in north-central Europe. It is certainly the pervasive model upon which the colonization process of the United States was built. It remains the standard by which things are measured in this country’s school systems, judicial codes, and government policies. These ideologies have a direct bearing on religious affiliations, cultural idiosyncrasy, and political persuasion. Norms of westernized, scientific inquiry have permeated even the subtler of our thought processes, and strongly influence how many of us formulate our inductive and deductive reasoning. These cognitive understandings determine

how we construct our daily behaviors, belief systems, and therefore our daily activity both public and private.

And yet, this institutionalized process of meaning making represents the belief system of a relatively small portion of our global society. The notion that conventional, western thought is applicable to universal understanding is, frankly, absurd. Further, the misconception that Cartesian thought is a superior method for deciphering truth is a denigrating appraisal of the value of other meaning-making systems, and has its roots firmly established in ethnocentric and ideologically totalitarian soil.

But what, if anything, makes the competing ideology of relativism more appealing or more relevant to our present world situation and its inhabitants? Relativism has, after all, been accused by its detractors as a ‘non-belief’ system that offers only a critique of an existing tradition, without providing any substantial answers. It couches thought in cryptic language, with confounding terms like paroxysm, simulacrum, and hyperrealism, while employing an accompanying array of often outlandish, sometimes hilarious, and usually contradictory forms of slippery-slope logic apparently designed to irritate and frustrate adversaries.

For as much audiovisual stimuli as is produced, there is precious little diversity of thought, and therefore a constricted range of options. The tele-visual education the buying public receives is often based on the four to five viewing hours they average on a daily basis, absorbing telemarketing strategies as well as the ideological perspective such imagery reflects. If, as Wertsch (1991) asserts, this bombardment of “unidirectional transmission freezes the debate”, then a new discourse seems essential for the re-birth of liberatory,

educational praxis.

In the classroom, from pre-school to graduate studies, the implementation of pedagogic strategies which give voice to students is a vital concern for healthy growth and development in each individual and her / his participation in society. Through learning to express one's opinions, record one's experiences, and share in the socially constructed view of the potentialities of a well-rounded life, students can come to realize the benefits of a truly democratized society. A re-visiting of educational strategies, which depend on students' creativity, as expressed in literary and artistic production, is sure to fuel the fires of natural curiosity and inquiry. In this pursuit, educators must come to regard young meaning-makers not so much as potential cogs in the wheels of a post-industrial corporate mega-structure, but as human beings engaged in a joint, communitarian effort to upgrade the value of our shared life experiences.

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