

PHOTOTHERAPY

A FIRST ATTEMPT TO CONSIDER THE USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS IN ART THERAPY

MARK WHEELER

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Mark Wheeler currently works in the UK National Health Service as Art Psychotherapist in a multi disciplinary Child and Family Therapy service. Mark was the first UK Art Therapist whose original degree was in photography, which remains a strong element in his own artwork. Mark's duties also involve systemic therapy with families, in which he has undertaken postgraduate training. The systemic practice has had a direct bearing in his approaches to photographs in a therapeutic context.

Mark's current clients/patients include individuals and families presenting with various distress. Responses range from helping families to adjust to life transitions to packages of different therapies in a long-term attempt to help with major difficulties of the types commonly labelled 'disorders' or 'dysfunctions, both emotional and neurodevelopmental'.

This is not a workshop manual; it is merely a bunch of ideas that might be useful to those already trained in family therapy or art therapy, counselling, psychotherapy or social work or making a referral to them. If in doubt, seek advice or clinical supervision from someone with suitable qualifications & experience.

The 2009 Derby workshop will include the ideas evolved in the decade-&-a-half since this was first written.

INTRODUCTION

This unpublished 1992 dissertation aimed to introduce therapists to some of the benefits and techniques available to systemic practitioners and Art Therapists using the medium of photography. The text is largely as written in 1992, with few minor corrections that have come to light since then and updated title page and introduction.

The term "**PhotoTherapy**" was coined in North America and used since the late 70s by Doug Stewart, Judy Weiser, David Krauss and Joel Walker to describe techniques for the use of photographs by qualified therapists with their clients. The term "**Phototherapy**" has also been used since about 1980 by Jo Spence and others in England, to describe any therapeutic use of photographs, not necessarily in formal counselling or psychotherapy. The term re-enactment phototherapy has been coined by Rosy Martin to describe her development of the practises she used with Jo Spence. For clarity, this dissertation describes all photo-related encounters between clients and professional therapists as Phototherapy and the use of photographs in personal growth work, co-counselling, life-story work and similar encounters as Therapeutic Photography. Thus all the case examples here are therapeutic photography because they describe work in a therapeutic community before I qualified and registered as an Art Therapist. So, phototherapy describes the use of photographs in therapy but not necessarily or exclusively art therapy. In 2008 at the conference in Turku, Judy Weiser proposed the term photo-art-therapy to describe the use of photographic media in art therapy practice, but this is not used in this 1992 dissertation.

I use 'photography' as a catch all umbrella to include conventional silver/gelatine processes; historical processes; polaroids; photocopies, digital camera images and mobile phone camera images. No special knowledge of photography itself is needed and I do not wish the therapeutic use of photographs to become yet another separate discipline; it has useful, but different, roles in art therapy and family therapy.

Photographs have certain unique qualities and resonances that enable them to be used in situations where other media might be less effective, counterproductively challenging, inappropriate or unavailable. People in the 'developed world' are photographically literate, bombarded daily by numerous photographic images. This commonplace familiarity reduces their perceived threat to the individual, and makes photographs a part of their internalised narratives.

Photographs have a particular ability to touch people very deeply. There is a **reality-trap** that enables viewers to transcend the medium without difficulty. This reality-trap is simultaneously photography's unique strength in therapy, but also its biggest danger-zone. The boundaries involved in therapeutic uses of photography need to be particularly clear, both to the therapist and to the patient or client.

This introductory essay concentrates on the use of still photographs, both pre-existing and specially created, and it will seek to compare some of the similarities to, and some of the differences from practice with other Art Therapy media. The use of photographs as an aid to Art Therapy is described as well as photographs functioning as objects or containers within the therapy. Moving images (cine or video) and computer manipulation raise further possibilities and pitfalls which are not considered here.

Phototherapy is a set of tools "Tools one keeps handy as extra ways to do your helping work with a few more flexible alternatives."

Judy Weiser (1984)

This essay seeks to explore and to share ideas for the therapeutic use of photographs within Art Therapy, some of which may be useful to other Art Therapists. Skilled, experienced, or trained photographers have no advantage over other clients or therapists in their work with photographs. Photographers may even be at a disadvantage, viewing photographs with an additional set of formal baggage or aesthetic countertransference.

The only way I can think of to present these techniques and ideas is to dismantle them in order to present verbally. In practice the areas to be considered often occur simultaneously and so they have lost something in my attempt to describe them. My experience practising as an Art Therapist is that while issues (like maintaining boundaries, transference, projection, using supervision etc) are usually examined, explored and described separately, they actually happen all the time (or at any time) in the therapeutic relationship. If one is to progress safely with the therapy none of these issues may be neglected or ignored at any time.

These areas of exploration have been divided by loose criteria relating to the content or history of individual photographs, based on the criteria proposed by Judy Weiser, especially in the unpublished draft (at the original time of writing this essay) of her book *PhotoTherapy Techniques*. The therapeutic considerations are preceded by a general discussion of relevant ideas about perception and the nature of the photograph as an artefact and as an image. These are particularly relevant to thoughts about where phototherapy fits into Art Therapy.

The word "image" was finally selected as my catch all term for whatever created object is involved in Art Therapy, whether it is painted, sculpted, printed, hewn, thrown, engraved or whatever. "Image" was chosen because of its link with "imagination". The use of s/he, his/hers, their, etc is fairly indiscriminate (sometimes depending on whether I have a particular individual in mind).

DEFINING "PHOTOTHERAPY"

"My working definition is that photo therapy is "the use of photography in a therapeutic setting, under the direction of a trained therapist, to reduce or relieve painful psychological symptoms, and as a method of facilitating psychological growth and change"

Doug Stewart (1979b)

The term "Phototherapy" does not imply a separate discipline. To me it is a very useful mode of Art Therapy and systemic therapy with a slightly different set of possibilities and limitations which make it a useful extra resource to draw on. For the North American writers who have contributed the much of the literature, clinical psychology practice and systemic family therapy inform their ideas. British authors seem to come from an analytical or counselling background.

Some author's material concerns the use of images as an aid to psychotherapy or family therapy, whereas for others authors, the photographs have a central role in any particular therapy and which can be worked with by the client and the therapist in the same way as any other image. These are images which may be created by the client, or used as the starting point for other work, perhaps by being altered, included in paintings, sculptures, collages or montages, manipulated by computer, or as objects invested in by the client.

My own experience of art, particularly in art education, is that its emotional and communicative qualities can be overwhelmed by rational approaches. Form is analysed, systems, semiotics and labels (often extraordinarily verbose, lengthy, and impenetrable) are imposed. Creativity becomes sapped of its emotion and reduced or deconstructed into its identifiable component parts. It can seem in criticism and education that the words to

describe art became more important than the art itself. If I could have said it with words why would artists have gone to all that extra creative and practical effort?

While I was an undergraduate I began to address some of my emotions and inner "stuff" using self portraits, "Equivalents", and reconstructed dreamscapes. These last led me into an exploration of the idea of photography and what photographs mean to many of us. It was the common place or "found" items which claimed a kind of reality trap (especially when photographed on Polaroid film). This reality trap is for me one of the great strengths of photography as an expressive medium, and also a strength (and primary difference from other creative forms) as a therapeutic tool.

It was through my own attempts to work with some of my own feelings and inner stuff using photography that I "discovered" phototherapy for myself. Until I heard Jo Spence use the term in connection with her self-portraits it was only half formed in my mind. I met Jo Spence briefly when I had almost reached the point of accepting academic received wisdom that photographs are formal things laden with craftsmanship and intellect but not emotion (unless it is being intellectualised). Her work and her encouragement ("Don't let the bastards grind you down") validated my drive to keep my photography concerned with my own issues, feelings and personal baggage. In particular I sought to explore my dream-work in a medium which seemed to share dreamlike qualities, the tension between what is real and not real, is experienced in strange timeframes, invested in the medium itself.

I spent five years working in a therapeutic community for emotionally damaged adolescents, where I used photographs while working with these young people, before training as an Art Therapist. At the time I had no form for my practise and "flew by the seat of my pants". My training, and subsequent supervised practice in various NHS Child and Family Therapy departments and clinics, has enabled me to make more sense of what I had instinctively begun doing with photographs, and to begin to understand the processes involved.

PERCEPTION AND PHOTOGRAPHS

The ways in which we receive data from, and make sense of, the world are so fundamental to our nature that awareness of these processes profoundly affects our approaches to therapy.

"Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognises before it can speak."

the opening lines of "Ways of Seeing"
John Berger (1972) p7

SENSORY DATA: Human beings, like other animals, rely on information to survive and multiply. The source of all this information is sensory: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Sight information dominates the data used by the typical human brain, and hence is usually the most influential in our understanding of our surroundings. There is a massive amount of this information continuously available to us so we handle only what we find useful or interesting (and ignore or reject by filtering out other data). This usually means visual data as for most of us visual data allows us to maintain our spatial relationships (finding useful things while not bumping into other things).

Most of us do not think in strings of words (except when we are trying to communicate thoughts) but in images: pictures, pictograms, icons, perhaps supported by other sensory data. Hence idiomatic speech includes "I see" to mean "I understand"; "Look after" or "Keep an eye on" to mean "take care of". Our internal communications do not include verbal conversations (despite the BEEZER comic's appealing idea of "The Numskulls" rushing about in the cranium passing messages and notes). Translating these into sentences

involves chopping them into discretely manageable and comprehensible sociologically agreed packets called words, and then stringing a well-chosen selection of these together.

Regardless of whose particular theory of perception one chooses to subscribe to, the way we look at and bring meaning to the world around us will usually be almost concurrent to the way we look at and bring meaning to photographs. We seek information and sense and respond emotionally or unconsciously to the less obvious clues. Conversely the way we look at photographs of our world is more than a metaphor for the way in which we make sense of our world. Often we have learned to view creative visual forms other than photographs in various ways which may be influenced by education, prior knowledge about that form and convention (for example children's drawings of home and family) or by ways that are culturally dependent. The photographic reality trap can short circuit its form and go direct to its content or meaning, while being overlaid with an emotional response which is all the more powerful through being less obvious.

"Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph. For photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights. This is true even in the most casual family snapshot. The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject."

John Berger (1972) p10

"Logicians tell us...that the terms "true" and "false" can only be applied to statements, propositions. And whatever may be the usage of critical parlance, a picture is never a statement in that sense of the term. ...Much confusion has been caused in aesthetics by disregarding this simple fact. It is an understandable confusion because in our culture pictures are usually labelled, and labels, or captions, can be understood as abbreviated statements. When it is said "the camera cannot lie", this confusion is apparent. Propaganda in wartime often made use of photographs falsely labelled to accuse or exculpate one of the warring parties."

E H Gombrich (1959) p59 [example omitted]

In our exploration of familiar photographs, perhaps our own or from the family album, the captions are not usually written but are carried by us to the photographs. This has a particularly important role in therapeutic work with personal historical material.

THERAPY: The bulk of our deliberate communication tends to be verbal and the deliberate communication involved in personal development and change is no exception. Verbal communication is based on strings of signs over a period of time, rather than any immediate whole presentation of the subject. Unfortunately purely verbal communication (or lack of recognition of non-verbal communication) has been shown to be at the heart of some of the types of personal problem that motivate people to participate in personal therapy. Much potential communication comprises non-verbal, indeed mainly visual, messages so therapeutic tools which can make use of these often have an advantage over purely "talking" therapies or analysis. This is before we even consider the idea that visual images and the realm of creativity belong in the realm of *primary process*.

One of the many benefits of Art Therapy is that it can both short circuit the inadequate verbal communications for some people, and add the visual and creative data. Both the creative and the reflective process use different routes through the participants' conscious and unconscious, which meet with different filters and preconceptions.

Creative therapies can enable people who may find verbal communication in therapy difficult or impossible (perhaps as a factor in their need for therapy or for reasons of physical

impairment, cultural differences etc). Ultra verbally sophisticated or defensive people are equally as challenging in talking therapies. Both the creative art therapy process and the reflective process can be spontaneous and uninhibited. Thus Art Therapy can enable patients and clients to be more intuitive and emotionally direct. It may enable the Therapist to tune into areas which would be inaccessible by ordinary talking, particularly in the realm of transference.

THE OBJECT: The image in Art Therapy becomes more than a short cut in communication. It is an object that continues to exist outside the realms of communication. Ignoring for a moment phenomenological considerations concerning the image outside of its role in the therapy, the image becomes invested with the feelings raised both by and through it and the exchanges that took place between the client and therapist. Ultimately the image could become what Joy Schaverien describes as a "talisman picture" (1992):

"The talisman picture in analytical art psychotherapy is an object to which a powerful attachment is made by the client, and sometimes by the therapist also. In the main I am treating this as a healthy and adaptive process.....this is an aesthetic as well as a magical response. Both are integrated elements of the healthy psyche"

This is dealt with in detail by Joy Schaverien in "The talisman: the empowered picture" (1992, chapter 7). Clients' own photographs as the images in Art Therapy may become similarly empowered, and worked with in the ways described.

There is a magic attached to photographs of absent loved ones that gives them all potential talisman properties. These photographs not only seem to affirm the existence (especially if a past existence) of the loved one, but also the photograph (even the standard studio pose) is an object in whose creation the loved one was actually involved.

Photographs of dead relatives also carry this magic, and photography is now a sufficiently long established medium for many of us to have photographs of long dead ancestors or relatives we have never met. The existence of the photograph confirms their past existence, and is an object which this relative actually had made individually and touched.

"A photograph is both a pseudo presence and a token of absence...talismanic uses of photographs express a feeling both sentimental and implicitly magical: they are attempts to contact or lay claim to another reality"

Susan Sontag (1973) p16

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH PHOTOGRAPHY

"I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking."

Christopher Isherwood;
Goodbye to Berlin, A Berlin Diary 1930

"What could be more surreal than an object which virtually produces itself, and with a minimum of effort? An object whose beauty, fantastic disclosures, emotional weight are likely to be further enhanced by any accidents which might befall it?"

Susan Sontag (1973) p52-3

A LITTLE HISTORY: Our public relationship with photography goes back over 150 years. Photography captured the popular imagination, it arrived at a time of great social change and it became the darling of a newly affluent segment of society throughout Europe and North America. It was skilfully marketed in a variety of guises from Daguerre (who brought

photography to the public's attention in 1839) to Eastmann (who pioneered mass taking of photographs with the sale of the "Kodak" camera). There can be very few in the "developed" northern hemisphere whose daily lives are not touched by photographs in some way.

"The representation of concrete reality, which springs from the primal human need of catching the passing moment on the wing, has become a truly sensuous art in the photographs of such men as Henri Cartier Bresson, Switzerland's Werner Bischof, and others."
Aniela Jaffe (1964)

And yet, Alfred Stieglitz created "Equivalent" photographs. Minor White used the photograph to express the deepest inner stuff, and popularised the idea that every photograph is (in part) a self portrait.

"Photographic images have been the sales tools, documentors, propagandists, and artefacts of every major idea, product and cause since the mid-1800s. When we refer to an event in "history" in the 20th century, we usually recall a photograph, be it of the Union Pacific, or the union of our parents. Because of the power of photographs on the mind, the wonder is not that photography and psychology are finally being used together, but that they have taken so long to be used."

Doug Stewart (1979b)

As early as 1856 Dr Hugh Diamond noted the improving effect photographs had on his patients who were mentally ill. He presented the first known paper on the therapeutic use of photographs to The Royal Society of Medicine. He proposed the use of photographs within psychiatric practice. Dr Thomas Barnado also used photography to work with patients' self image.

David Krauss (Chicago) and Judy Weiser (Vancouver) have pulled together many strands and maintain comprehensive updated bibliographies and collections of material as well as advancing the practice itself. Judy Weiser's book uses a predominantly systemic approach to the images themselves and can be highly recommended as an illustration of how systemic thinking could be applied to any images.

Photographs benefit from visual rapid response, with additional contemptuous familiarity, which makes them non-threatening and comfortable artefacts. Photographs also get strong responses: personal feelings or memories triggered (eg looking at family albums), more general human responses (distant war photographs). And yet the deliberately expressive photograph is still a rare thing among the millions of photographic images produced every year.

Those people who become interested in the medium itself seem to become less expressive, more rational and more formal in their photographs, often becoming seduced by the minutiae of the medium and its processes.

"Photography has the unappealing reputation of being the most realistic, therefore facile, of the mimetic arts"

Susan Sontag (1973)

The ordinary family snapshot is as heavily invested with emotions as the harrowing imagery of Don McCullin. Subject content, positioning, lighting and location in unfamiliar photographs can all stir resonances deep within us. How much more telling are the photographs we have taken ourselves or appear in personally.

Photographs are commonplace objects. Looking at them is socially acceptable and showing them is socially desirable (the price paid for wedding albums and studio portraits confirms this). Looking at photographs within therapy can be initially a more accessible way into a patient's world, that is their reality. The photographs also affirm or validate that reality (at least symbolically) for the client and to the therapist.

The photograph, like any other object, has no inherent meaning of its own. It may be an acceptably accurate two dimensional representation of the viewfinder contents at a particular moment. It is however nothing more than a piece of paper or plastic with a few chemical marks on it. The taker of the photograph invested it with their meaning. The viewer of the photograph also brings meaning to it, although not necessarily the same meaning.

Hence the meaning of the photograph is created as much by the viewer as it is by the photographer, that is, a phenomenological process. The therapist is very interested in the "process" of interaction with photographic images, as well as the images themselves. "PhotoTherapy" is seen (that visual metaphor again) by Judy Weiser as a **verb** as well as a noun in order to emphasise it as process; a verb I'd hate to try and conjugate in English though...I phototherapise, you phototherapise, s/he phototherapises....

"Anyone who has taken lots of photos has become aware that the photograph in and of itself has no meaning. Agreed, it documented what the camera was pointed at, but it is perceived by, and given meaning by, the person who took the picture (and those who later view it); the person who chose what was to be framed, and when was the "right" moment to shoot. In this sense, all photos we take are self portraits, expressions of the conscious and unconscious self, moments of importance chosen for whatever personal reasons to be frozen in time forever, and if deemed successful, kept and treasured as items of value."

Judy Weiser (1984)

Most people will have experienced photographs which "didn't come out" or failed to capture for them what they had originally intended. They have the advantage of recalling some of what they had intended to achieve with a particular shot, other viewers will bring different responses. Show a holiday snap to several friends and their reactions will be very different: whether they were there at the same time, know someone pictured, have been there in other seasons, would like to go there, knew someone else who had been there, do or don't like the sound of the place, seen some earlier pictures of another era.

"Phototherapy is especially powerful, beneficial, and to the point with clients who use visual sense accessing cues. Therefore, clients who use verbs and phrases such as "I see your point...focus in on...cloudy...foggy notion...hazy...get the picture...I want to show you...clearly...see what I mean..."etc should find this way of working extremely efficacious. It should be clear that the use of phototherapy may also be especially helpful to clients who are not very verbal or who have language problems."

David Krauss (1980)

This description matches that of examples of patients who are particularly receptive to or benefited by Art Therapy. Photography is usually a slow creative process whose practicalities exclude its use in some therapeutic settings. Polaroid instant images are a useful if expensive exception.

In Art Therapy the images and created objects can contain, project, crystallise, catalyse and cathartise. The triangular relationship between Client, image, and Art Therapist is an especially useful place for enabling therapy. The image carries more than its resonances for the client and the therapist. More than the meaning invested in it by its creator, and more than the meaning brought by the viewer. This is the relationship in the gallery or the album

but therapy is more than this....ultimately the image can become the container for so much that its use has to be carefully managed.

The use of the reality trap photographic image may also build representational bridges for those clients who have difficulties connecting with their freer creative products. When viewing photographs people tend to see through the medium. This is a unique property of photographs.

We respond to a (notional) photograph of the late aunt Maud:

"Look, there's aunt Maud in the garden"

It is because we believe ourselves to be looking at aunt Maud exactly as they remember her at the time, or believe her to have been at the time.

The myth of the truthful camera and the realistic print pervades deeply. This is also a double edged sword, especially for the therapist. Viewing photographs can cut straight through our defences and tap into feelings about the subject. Equally attitude to the photograph often parallels feelings toward the subject. We cherish and protect photographs of loved ones and tear up photographs when angry. In 1988 at The Museum of Modern Art in Paris there was a fascinating exhibition of Chinese post revolutionary photography which showed how people were airbrushed out or reinserted in group photographs as their political favour waned and waxed, thus denying or affirming their existence.

PHOTOGRAPHS IN THERAPY

Which, if any, photographs brought by a client to a session, and how s/he chooses to present and interact with them is also an important element of the process. Those photographs which have been omitted are equally as important as those presented. The omissions can illustrate the client's willingness, reluctance, readiness or commitment to the therapy at the time of selection, or directly identify those relationships which are troubling or carry unresolved feelings. Two questions which can open new avenues of exploration, and which may prove as useful as interaction with the pictures themselves:

"Are there any picture which you did not bring with you?"

"Are there any pictures which you would have liked to bring but were unavailable or do not exist?"

"We cannot theorise the workings or nature of remembering without at the same time considering the systematic mechanisms of forgetting. Once we begin to think of both seeing and memory as primarily defensive and self-protective operations, saturated with fantasy, then the status of photographic imagery is affected rather radically"

Simon Watney [quoted by Jo Spence (1991) p202]

SELF PORTRAITS:

"As a high street photographer, I offered my 'gifts' to members of the public who paid me in order to provide them with images of idealised family life which would support the idea that all families are 'happy' and that thus my clients were 'good parents'. ...In contrast to this, when I became ill in 1982, I began to use photography for myself instead of other people, and it became a way of having a dialogue with myself, or re-visioning illness, and asking new questions."

Jo Spence (1990)

Achievable with a self timer, a long cable or bulb release, remote camera trigger, and even use of an assistant to make the actual exposure. "Exposure" it is too. Self portraits are an incredibly useful technique, very powerful, but also potentially more threatening than any other phototherapy technique. The therapeutic framework within which such therapy takes place has to be strong and safe.

Most people when looking at a group photograph which includes themselves will first seek themselves out in it and check out how they look in relation to the others. It could hardly be more direct and to the point than to see ones self positioned within the familial group. Conversely, such powerful confrontation with themselves and with the "reality" of the photograph needs to take place within carefully constructed boundaries, effectively contained. Early during my photography degree course the students were assigned to make self-portraits. This threatened several students so much that some refused to comply. "Why do you think I'm a photographer" appealed one whose style documented the lives of others, "When you're a photographer you're safely behind the camera, outside of everything".

Self portraits are fixed for that chosen fraction of a second which eliminates the continuous self adjustment which takes place when looking into a mirror. The adjusted mirror image of ourselves is probably more familiar than any other. A well-known society photographer found that he increased his sales when he showed clients reversed proofs because they were more familiar with (less threatened by) the mirror image of themselves. Being confronted with oneself (as seen by others) also raises the potential for conversation with oneself, for exploration of the context of self in the picture, for fantasy and hypothesis, and to explore change over time.

Self portraits may be worked with in a historical context or in the present context. They may also be used to enable the client to model responses to situations and to see themselves, as others see them or as they would like to see themselves, in these roles.

PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY THE CLIENT & ASSIGNMENTS

In common with drawn, painted, sculpted and otherwise created images in Art Therapy, these have been created by the client. They are particularly useful if created in the context of the therapy. This can be difficult as photography often imposes delays between the motivation for the image, the creation of the negative (or transparency), the developing and printing, and then the opportunity to interact between client, image and therapist. This can be overcome between sessions using fast high street processors or within sessions using Polaroid or other instant films but these are very expensive in use. Some Polaroid materials can also be manipulated while they are developing. Unfortunately public impatience for "instant" materials to become even more instant has resulted in ever quicker processes which now require a burst of frenzied activity for only a few seconds before the image is fully formed and almost immutable.

Just as in the family album, patterns and themes emerge in a person's photographs. In the subject matter, in the ways of looking, in their responses to situations, in their responses to the photographs. In a similar manner to a painting, a presented photograph might highlight or crystallise an area of concern for the client; alternatively it might appear to contradict what has been described by a patient and working with thus.

"Photographs taken by clients may be considered projections of the client's personality and worked as the clinician would work a dream. The client can be asked to become and give voice to the photograph and the various objects it portrays."

David Krauss (1980)

The imposition of the photographic frame takes manageable slices of the world and can be equally significant in what it excludes as what it includes. It is also an act of omnipotence and manipulation to *take* a photograph and impose a personal order and appearance on the world. The photographer's relationships with the photographed, both at the time of the exposure and other times, is also open to exploration.

Photographs taken as part of specific assignments can address specific areas of the client's life. They might fill in gaps in the client's own family album or memory. They might present alternative versions of past scenarios, re-enacting the potential alternative actions and outcomes. They might be used as a vehicle to explore previously undiscovered feelings, which can be explored at an appropriate pace, rather than one dictated by circumstances.

An example might be for a client to revisit and photograph a significant place. The feelings associated with that place can be explored through the pictures in the therapeutic relationship rather than the logistically difficult (and possibly undesirable) alternative of the therapist and patient making visits to the place together.

If the therapist is photographing the client as part of the therapeutic process, the reciprocal (client photographing the therapist) may be equally valid. The therapeutic process depends in part on a mutual relationship.

"Within phototherapy we have the option of taking up a range of different positions within the mother-daughter dyad. ...The therapist's gaze does not attempt to control or objectify, but rather to enable meanings and memories to be unpicked within a context of nurturance and acceptance"

Rosy Martin (1991) p210

HISTORICAL ☉ ALBUM ☉ PHOTOBIOGRAPHICAL

"The family album: what does it contain? What lies beyond the symbolic images of special events, occasions, celebrations, 'success' - particularly weddings, the new baby, holidays, the 'happy family'? The images chosen by us (or our families) to immortalise each complex, struggling, contesting, power-contained group that makes up 'the family'? These few fast fading idealised images, these 'decisive moments' that go to prove that 'we were happy then'? We thumb through them again, anxious to discover some still hidden memory, some notion of a past that we belonged to. Yet we fail again and again. Perhaps because it is not yet safe enough to begin to remember?"

Jo Spence (1991) p203

Emotions which have remained suppressed or hidden, because they were inconvenient or threatening etc may re-surface more readily within the safe therapeutic boundaries in response to photographs of life and family. Equally forgotten good emotions and experiences can emerge through photographs and offer hope in the present. The snaps can make a direct link to past times and events, people, and locations. They can also illustrate resources which the client has drawn on and used to deal with difficulties in the past which now seems elusive or blocked. Life story books, so frequently created by fostered children in conjunction with their social workers, may inadvertently ruminate on these resonances, traumatising rather than their intended healing.

In the past the wealthy commissioned family portraits to emphasise their family continuity, even to create a sense of permanence, immortality or pedigree. These have assumed such importance to their patrons that they have been commissioned retrospectively to cover omissions or to satisfy insecurities. The original "Kodak" or "Brownie" and the family album have helped democratise and enable the family visual record, and enlarge its scope to include the personal occasion souvenir. These photographs are important to their keepers and to other members of that family and even their community. Family albums are like a series of markers of key events (both recorded or omitted) highlighting what has changed, remained unchanging, or is in the process of changing. Much of family therapy is concerned with enabling families to adjust to significant events (or transitions) and these events are often those deemed worthy of a place in the album (births, first day at school, weddings, etc) or too painful for album inclusion (funerals, illness etc).

"[These pictures] form an evidence of existence which documents the inherent themes, patterns, and concerns of a client's life. In this way, photographs provide clues and valuable information that might not be otherwise available to the clinician regarding the client's homelife, family, significant others, social milieu, and world outside of the therapy session in general....These photographs show a system operating with a hierarchy and rules. The photograph becomes a kind of stop action which freezes the dynamics of the system and allows them to be scrutinized."

David Krauss (1980)

Repetitions over generations become apparent. Patterns emerge among who are photographed together and who are not. Susan Sontag described the portrait chronicles of families bearing witness to the family's connectedness. The patterns which emerge in the pictures or in our (clients') responses to them reveal the functioning of the family (extended as widely and as multi-generationally as possible); how each person, relationship, repeated attitude or behaviour fits into the whole and affects us (or our clients). What does it mean to be this person or people within this picture and within this family network? How does it feel?

In a workshop with Rosy Martin I used transparencies of group photographs of my family of origin to explore our relationships by projecting them life-size and standing in each person's projected image, exploring my position. I was then photographed within these projections, and the images thus created became the subject of further, more protracted, work.

There is a danger when working with family albums that the patterns which emerge have the potential to be become pathologised. This is a similar danger to one familiar to Art Therapists, who are often asked to comment on images by colleagues from other professions who hope the Art Therapist will light upon some previously unrecognised psychopathology. The objective diagnostic interpretation through images is a popular myth among many other professionals and patients. The recognisable patterns which emerge from albums can equally be illustrative of social attitudes as of individual relationships (although the two are probably inseparable). In a hypothetical example:

Therapist: "Is any significant person missing from these childhood photographs?"

Client: "My father"

Therapist: "Why is he absent from them?"

Client: "Because he took the pictures"

This could suggest that the client's father was only comfortable when in control of situations (in this instance arranging the family for their picture to be taken by him). It could suggest that to him the family, like his camera, were a part of his possessions.

"To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge - and therefore power."

Susan Sontag (1973)

But it could also suggest a whole bunch of other things. These are closed assumptions which are part of the meanings which might be brought by a viewer but are dangerous in isolation. Art Therapists are fully aware that diagnosis of a patient based on their image content would be misleading. The therapeutic process takes place with the client using images in a variety of ways, which applies equally to photographic images which have been brought by the client.

"Photos can be used as resources in the true sense of the word: re-source-ing the good times, pleasant feelings, and client strengths and abilities, especially in times of stress or crisis where those memories may not seem as accessible, where they can be used to offer hope, perspective of time past the crisis, of continuity from the past to the future where one might again re-access those feelings and accomplishments. Similarly, they can be used to help correct distortions and misrepresentations, as they are an undeniable record of the past that no account of verbal filtering can cover up."

Judy Weiser

This walks a fine line between the illusory, but convincing, qualities of photographs and their inherent surrealism. eg The standard professional family portrait will often appear to say more about the studio's standard method of working and contemporary professional style than about the pictures family. I have included a couple of examples which both feature standard painted backgrounds and props. The unknown Victorian or Edwardian woman (to whom I presume I am related as it comes from my own family album) is seated in a "classical" studio set which refers to centuries of portraiture confidently looking straight to camera (and probably enduring a very long exposure time). But my Grandfather is standing in wrinkled "Great War" battledress, possibly in a makeshift army studio (note the tatty floor-covering curled up onto the slanting creased background) staring off camera into the distance. More clues may exist from subtle body language to inclusions and omissions.

Some clients may not have access to their family photographs, or such photographs may never have been taken. This may indicate their economic level, or that the patient was not "seen" in the family. David Krauss (1980) suggests that clients who do not have access to pictures of themselves and their history "probably have a low self-concept". "All clients, even if they do not have any previous photographs, can be given a simple camera and asked to construct a family album".

The creation of a family album offers opportunity for various hypothetical types of album. The album which the patient desires, the album which they consider most likely, and album which addresses the areas of their family life which was most upsetting or uncomfortable. The reality trap of the photographs enables these hypothetical histories to transcend their hypothetical status with a deep significance. Jo Spence effectively explored areas of her past and her relationship with her mother by creating images of her mother re-enacted by Jo and photographed by Rosy Martin.

Different reactions to the same photo can be compared. This may raise awareness of the discrepancies between our and other's perceptions, particularly in this often well defended/protected area of self image/awareness. The "photographic proof" myth of

photography strongly reinforces this work, and is hard to resist. This is not to impose stereotypes of beauty but to aid the growth of a positive self image or to document changing demeanour.

Meanings projected onto photographs by the client, transference phenomena, non-verbal responses, direct answers to therapists questions, questions to the therapist, apparently spontaneous offerings etc all apply as much as to other images. In common with other Art Therapy situations, none of the specific techniques or approaches described is ever likely to be relevant in isolation.

SPECIFICALLY PHOTOGRAPHIC THERAPEUTIC ISSUES:

Just as the Art in Art Therapy can be a great pleasure in itself, a form of release, a joyous outpouring or lots of fun; so can photography. But if the creative process itself becomes the sole focus of interaction between the client and the therapist then valuable insights and potential for growth and change will be missed. Photography is particularly captivating in this respect and it would be too easy for a session to transmute into a photo workshop.

Conversely, rigid adherence to the therapeutic techniques (perhaps through lack of confidence in understanding them) would destroy the human relationship that is at the core of Art Therapy. Sets of prescient interpretations and analyses also de-humanise the relationship and drift towards semiotics or the interpretative dictionary.

When the therapist is working with a patient's own photographs (perhaps a treasured old family group picture), during therapy a quantity of stuff may emerge which will become attached to this picture. The photograph can become the container for new stuff emerging in therapy in addition to its existing contained feelings. The therapist must be able to manage this in an appropriate manner for each client or patient, enabling growth and change.

The photograph/container may safely enable one client to continue their therapeutic process themselves, perhaps using that photograph or others, while a previously valued family snap may become an unbearable container of unresolved bad experiences for another. An extreme physical example might be the destruction of an entire album of photographs depicting the life of a family which had rejected a client who later desperately wanted some of them reinstated extant. Making photocopies allows active work with photographs while preserving the originals. The photocopies being on plain paper (rather than plastic or resin coated photographic paper) can be overpainted, glued, cut, montaged or otherwise altered in ways which might be impossible or undesirable with the original.

Copying colour photographs into black and white allows the new monochrome copy to become a container for ongoing therapeutic work, with sufficient material qualitative differences to leave the treasured memory album intact (if appropriate). The decision about where to keep photographs and other art works that have been used in sessions is challenging. Will the material carry unfinished business into the clients home if they take it from the session? If so, will it enable them to continue the work started in the sessions or could it be counterproductively upsetting? I have tended to err on the side of caution.

Transference in Art Therapy has been explored by Joy Schaverien (1987 and 1992). Transference of past emotions (perhaps related to a person in a photograph brought into therapy) onto the therapist or an image could possibly be accelerated by the presence of the photograph. Joy Schaverien avers that transferences are made to the images in Art Therapy, whereas they are made to the therapist in analysis (1992 p16 *ibid*). In creating a

photograph the client may make transference to it in the same way as to a painting. When the picture is finished (it need not even have been made by the client) it continues to exist. It also has the potential to be altered physically, to have its context changed, to be looked at or not.

"The picture mediates in the therapeutic relationship and has considerable influence on it. This is complex and there are two strands to it; the first of these strands is the way the picture affects the person who made it. The artist/client is, in fact a viewer at this stage of the process. ...The second of the strands...is the aesthetic countertransference; that is, the effects of the picture on the art therapist/viewer, as well as the client"

Joy Schaverien (1992) p103-4

When the image is a photograph, with all its particular implications (especially those of the reality trap) this becomes an increasingly complex area which deserves more detailed exploration than I offer. The therapist's countertransference is a particularly powerful instrument in both the therapy process and especially in the continuing assessment of that therapeutic process. Photographs (perhaps of a client's abusive parent for whom the client holds conflicting feelings; perhaps of someone who resembles someone known to the therapist or even who resembles the therapist himself) provoke strong countertransference both to their content and to the client who brought or made them. With appropriate supervision these can become productive.

The processes contained by a photograph which has been used in a therapeutic intervention will permanently alter its context for the client. Photographs which are part of a family album, or which have other special significance outside the therapeutic space can, if appropriate, be protected from this or from material damage. Making photocopies of the client's photographs and only using the copies in sessions is one effective approach to this dilemma. The advent of affordable computer desktop scanners and image manipulation software opens up new possibilities which I have not tried.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this introductory essay I explained how I would have to dismember the areas to be considered in order to consider them individually and communicate them. The human relationship that takes place in therapy has tended to become squeezed out as I have explored some of the issues involved in using photographs in systemic & Art Therapy.

Perhaps this is the point where the intuitive processes that are so important in therapy should take over. My experience to date has been that once the boundaries have been negotiated and therapy gets underway these become very important. The photographs and the stories that they facilitate and contain could be worked with in clinical supervision in the same ways as other images and narratives.

I hope these similarities will encourage Art Therapists and Family Therapists and other counsellors and psychotherapists to consider working with photographs in therapy when appropriate.

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These references include those books and articles that have been referred to in the text or directly quoted from. It also includes those reference works in which I have checked the accuracy or context of other ideas which I have drawn upon. Undated or un-numbered

references in the text refer to pieces whose source has been difficult to trace, existing as they do, as photocopies in my own collection. Material I have found particularly useful is starred.

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Reproduced photographs

Not in this version to keep the file size small

Author's own collection:

Inter-war Kodak print wallet

Nineteenth century print reverse

Unknown studio portrait of my Grandfather

Contents of my Great-grandfather's cigarette case carried constantly by my great-aunt May

Unidentified nineteenth century studio portrait

Edwardian beach scene of my paternal grandmother and her siblings

Edwardian Kodak Print wallet

1924 Kodak invoice