Creating Places-of-Memory: Photographs, Identity, & Matrilineality

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CREATING PLACES-OF-MEMORY: PHOTOGRAPHS, IDENTITY, AND MATRILINEALITY

By

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B.A. University of Maine at Augusta, 2017

A THESIS

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Creating Places-of-Memory: Photographs, Identity, and Matrilineality

By Aylah Ireland

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My artistic practice and family genealogy create the opportunity for a change in the perception of family history. I seek to illuminate and reframe family history and definitions of self while exploring an alternative to, or an addendum to, the patrilineal model of genealogy. Using the photographs and information gathered from my matrilineal bloodline and my preconceived definitions of self, I have created artworks that are places-of-memory. The places-of-memory, sometimes locations, sometimes objects, or sometimes the interaction with objects in an environment, provide an opportunity for discussion regarding the omitted or dismissed nature of the matrilineal line. This paper outlines the theoretical background of family history and identity, using photographs as methodology.

In analyzing my family photographs, I have found I can use photographs as a tangible grounding for exploring abstract concepts such as memory and transgenerational family dynamics. Providing examples of my artwork and the work from a selection of my contemporaries, I show photographs used as a prompt for conversations and the impetus for my artistic practice.
The visual components of this thesis work consist of seven portraits of my matrilineal bloodline. The organization of my artwork is modeled after the photo album while managing to challenge the traditional book-bound layout. In place of a book-style format, rendering the work in mediums such as cyanotype, resin molded into cube shapes, and 24inch x 36inch film-negatives creates a new arrangement of the photo album.
DEDICATION

To my mother,
for sharing her knowledge, love, and support

And to the 16 generations of my matrilineal line:
Mom, Nana, Annie, Azuba Delilah, Hanna, Azuba Noles,
Susanna, Jeanne, Catherine, Pierrette, Louise, Marie Le B.,
Marie, Marguerite, Madeleine H, Madeleine C.
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I had the pleasure of working with Amy Stacey Curtis from June 2019 until the present. The time I spent working with Amy has completely changed the way I approach my work. She taught me the importance of process, how to plan long-term exhibitions, and drafting and submitting exhibition proposals. Working closely with an established artist whose process is so drastically different from my own was an enlightening opportunity. Amy helped me hone and develop the strengths of my process; she helped me organize my process, my thoughts, and mature my connection between the concept and visual work. Thank you very much, Amy!

Dr. Owen F. Smith deserves recognition for sharing his knowledge, library, and artist multiples. His belief in the potential of his students has been a supporting factor in my growth and tenacity. He has given me the confidence in myself to not only complete a master’s degree but tackle Ph.D. research. Gratias Tibi.

Thank you, Dr. Susan Smith, for teaching my first and only feminist art class, may there be many more. Her social approach to teaching has allowed for a shift in perspective and artistic growth.
I sincerely could not have done this without the support and community of my graduate cohort—Rachel Church, Arturo Camacho, Anna Martin, Josh Couturier, and Reed Hayden. We made it through three years of hard work, endless critiques, hours of artist-talks on cold hard chairs, and COVID. They are some of the most creative intellectuals I have ever worked with, and I am proud to call them all my friends.

Thank you to my husband, David, without whom this journey would not have been possible. Thank you for tolerating my absences while I worked in the studio and at my computer, for learning about the art world and keeping me humble, for co-parenting, being my best friend and partner in this crazy world.

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It is difficult to thank everyone in the ways they all deserve. Each person has been listed not by any hierarchy of importance. I am grateful to everyone for all the help, love, support, and guidance.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION: PHOTOGRAPHS, IDENTITY & MATRILINEALITY

Patricia Di Bello, Professor of History and Theory of Photography at Birkbeck, University of London, asks: “what would happen if the actual photographs kept by an individual woman in her house, were subjected to the formal, social, semiological and psychoanalytical scrutiny usually reserved for canonical works, kept in institutional archives and important collections?” (Di Bello 10). Di Bello challenges the status quo of what is essential in being formally scrutinized. What would happen if I formally analyze my “actual photographs?” Analyzing my actual family photographs could lead to challenging the general status quo, but what about a more specific analysis of the influence of the photographs of my matrilineal line? The study of my matrilineal photographs explores an alternative to or provides an addendum to the patrilineal model of genealogy. By using my artistic practice of alternative photo processes and family photographs as a methodology for exploring the abstract, the outcome of this thesis should illuminate and reframe family history and definitions of self.

In examining my “actual photographs” and creating works of art based on these photographs, I was able to develop lieu de mémoire, a term coined by French philosopher Pierre Nora, meaning places of memory or, as I write, places-of-memory. Photographs are physical objects that are entry points for history and memory, truth and fiction. History/memory, and truth/fiction are elements that influence our identities as well as our family identities. In creating places-of-memory, each art piece creates a feedback loop of information re-informing my identity, in turn, re-informing my work. By abstracting my family photographs, organizing them, and creating a specific context, the feedback loop is available to the viewer. Everyone has some kind of family, a history, and some form of identity, which is in a constant state of fluidity. The
places-of-memory are opportunities to compare the individual experience of family history and personal identity to a more extensive cultural process of identity.

Throughout this paper, the ethnographic technique of the “layered account” method occurs as a manner of incorporating personal narrative into academic writing. For clarity, the “layered account” narratives, signified by asterisks, an indicator used by Carol Rambo, indicate a change in the author’s voice.

The concept of photographs as a methodology is discussed in Chapter Two, drawing from the philosophy of Photography from Roland Barthes, Martha Langford, and Susan Sontag, the memory theory from Pierre Nora, and the visual work of artists Linda Fregni Nagler and Meghann Riepenhoff. These influences have shaped my artistic practice in a way that challenges what a methodology can be. Considering photographs as a methodological process instead of a mere medium, I can use physical objects as places-of-memory to explore and reframe family history and definitions of self. One photograph, out of context, cannot tell a view much beyond the *mise en scène*, yet, whether truth or fiction, the relationship between the photographs begins to construct a narrative, begins to become a place-of-memory.

Chapter Three briefly outlines the psychological and historical influence of the construction of human identity. The main focus, however, is how my artistic practice has provided a window into the process of the feedback loop of identity as I make sense of my genealogical history. Texts from sociologist and anthropologist Carol Rambo implore the importance of autobiographical/autoethnographic narratives in academic writing when discussing identity using a layered account. Paula Nicolson’s research on the relationship between genealogy and identity buttresses my work and provides a sociological methodological approach.
to my artistic practice. The writings are reinforcements for how the creative process paired with self-reflection can lead to a feedback loop of information to be either continued or disrupted.

Chapter Four outlines how found-family-photographs deepened my attraction to my matrilineal bloodline. Since the invention of photography, my ancestors are separated from the present by generations and are only visible through photographs and not through experiential memory. Family photographs create a visual connection between the ancestor and descendant, beginning a new line of memory and history. Art historian Martha Langford writes: “we may read a photographic image differently when our understanding of the conditions under which it was produced changes, but we are inserting new data into a fixed visual record” (2007, 100). We are, at the very least, providing an extension to each ancestor’s life-story by considering the history of photography and culture in tandem.

1.1 PHOTOGRAPHS

The photographs I have collected for this thesis depict my female bloodline from myself, backward seven generations. Family photographs can become a blueprint\(^2\) for seeing the abstract qualities of family identity. “[P]hotography’s social functions are integrally tied to the ideology of the modern family. The family photo both displays the cohesion of the family and is an instrument of its togetherness; it both chronicles family rituals and constitutes a prime objective of those rituals” (Hirsch 7). Marianne Hirsch’s summary of photography’s connective nature introduces it as more than a creative medium. Moreover, an individual pursuing family photographs could use its unique insight into the abstract for one’s own identity. Photos become a methodology, a tangible and grounding reference into ideas of self-identity and family identity.
Photographs act as a grounding reference into the abstract, allowing my artworks to be free to become places-of-memory. Extracting ideas from writers and theorists like Roland Barthes, Martha Langford, Pierre Nora, and Susan Sontag, the family photograph becomes more than a medium and the sum of its symbology. Photographs as a methodology are a process where abstract concepts such as identity, memory, history, and matrilineality can unite contradictions like truth and fiction. Family photographs are prompts for discussing the ephemeral nature of consciousness.

Martha Langford writes of the possibility of “…photographic images produced and organized to function as repositories of collective memory. They are photographic translations of memories that have been transmitted to the artists as versions, rumours, and myths. As memories they are mutable and they are also marked for preservation, destined to become histories” (Langford 2007; 190). Photographs exist as places-of-memory. Photos reshape memory while being fixed entities. Photos, categorized as archives, can attribute to the historical record. They primarily exist as truth and fiction.

The connection of photographs to memory is relatable for people, at least in Western culture, where my research is focused. Photographs depict scenes we presumably remember. If we are unable to remember, the photograph fills the memory void. The photographic terminology is invariably connected to describe aspects of memory: we talk about events being surreal “like a movie” or “picture perfect.” Memory can be described as “flashbulb memory” or “photographic memory,” and “the popular Western notion of memory as a kind of snapshot album whose pages [is] accessed at will.” (Langford 2007; 289, Lindholm 309). These terms used for a medium which is fixed and immutable also describe the abstract and unreliable.
Again, the terminology does not exclusively discern between truth and fiction, yet photographs are a tangible grounding in the abstract.

1.1.1. Memory Bench

Fig. 1. Memory Bench, 2019

Using photographs as prompts for memory is not possible when there are not photographs attributed to a specific memory. A place-of-memory that existed in my life, which had no physical pictures, was an apartment in which I used to live. It now exists as an empty lot where the building once stood. Exploring the relationship between site and memory, I visited this vacant lot in person and while keeping field notes and taking photographs of the empty lot. Haunted by recurring dreams of this now-demolished apartment building, I began to write about those dreams and draw any images which lingered.

I searched for images of the apartment building to help jog my memory. I collected images of the vacant lot from Google Earth in person and was able to find one digital image of the apartment building through property-tax records. Together, the images gathered and the field notes, an almost complete “picture,” began to form. I was able to start to create an art project
using all of the gathered information as a photographic prompt. The following layered account example is an extraction from my field notes.

* * *

June 25, 2019

Site/non-site project: Father Figure (working title)

The Court St. site is an empty lot where a large house converted to apartments once stood; it is a place where my dad rented an apartment for seven years. I have made drawings from memory on top of Google Earth images. I have visited the site and collected more pictures; I have collected sticks from the property. The sticks collected may share my memory. I found three objects in my possession, which I have carried with me since living there—15 years since we moved from the Court St. apartment.

In writing about my dreams, I will ideally create a purge channel and discover why my memory of that place is still so strong. It has been a long time since I pondered the site. I avoided that street for many years. There was undoubtedly some traumatic imprinting there. However, I think this was the time period when my dad was the most stable. 1996/7- 2004?

I think the constant dreaming of how fragile the three stories of exterior stairs were scared me then. The lack of stability still scares me now.

* * *

Much of my work has a repetitive process or a mindfulness quality to the process. I was worried that this project would not have those qualities, but I discovered the process itself was repetitive. I visited the space multiple times, and I found various shots of the empty site; I emailed city officials numerous times.
I created a fake-stone bench, and leaving it on the site is just for me. The audience does not exist, and the building does not exist; the only way to experience the former space is in my memory. The piece also has some unexpected irony in its building materials; having a bench constructed of lightweight foam allows for structural insecurity. Leaving the artwork on the site without gaining permits or permissions also leaves the work at the mercy of public workers, property owners, and pedestrians. In monitoring the piece over several days of revisiting, the artwork has moved twice and appears to have been broken and put back together. The bench, much like my memory, exists in a state of vulnerability and uncertainty.
Fig. 1.4. Field notes from *Memory Bench* research, 2019

Fig. 1.5. Google Map screenshot of the empty lot, 2019
1.2 IDENTITY

Carol Rambo, formerly Rambo-Ronai, discusses the fluid nature of identity, influenced by memory, history, and experience. “Identity is a process dependent on consciousness, likewise, is always left with traces of what went before” (Rambo 564). Her use of the layered account, an ethnographic technique that incorporates personal narrative with academic writing, allows the reader to “reconstruct the subject, thus projecting more of themselves into it, and taking more away from it” (Ronai 396). The following paper will incorporate this technique, ebbing between theory, analysis, and anecdote, to gain better insight into the author/artist.

* * *

My close relationship with my maternal grandmother became the impetus for my research into identity and matrilineage. My grandmother, whom I call Nana, and her interests influenced my identity formation: she taught me how to sew, which led to a sense of resourcefulness; she taught my sister and me how to cook, allowing us to experiment with ingredients, which fostered a love of learning and creative exploration; she tolerated my snooping around her house as a kid, which developed sharp attention to detail and interest in investigating. Nana actively demonstrated the labor of wife, mother, and grandmother without letting herself slip into complacency. Well into her eightieth decade, she had read thousands of books ranging from the standard murder-mystery to Nietzsche. Nana was the first person in our family to have a desktop computer in the 1990s, taking adult-education classes at her local community center to educate herself with modern technology.

Despite losing her hearing in her adulthood, she pushed herself to succeed in the areas which held importance to her. These modern-day “accomplishments” exhibited her drive, which was inspiring. Observing her over time, I unconsciously emulated her confidence to pursue
challenges without being hampered by the possibility of disappointment. Moreover, we shared similar interests, which led to a stimulating conversation. One of our shared interests was genealogy, though we undoubtedly had different motives. Another of our shared interests involved combing through family photographs, where I asked questions about Nana’s life before she had children, and she would tell stories for hours.

* * *

1.2.1. *Rape-Kit Swag-Bag*

Another example of my work that relied on a memory lacking photographic evidence was *Rape-Kit Swag-Bag*. This artwork was about a visceral-memory related to an assault of my identity as a woman. Similar to that of the *Memory Bench*, I had to create my own “picture” before I could begin. I created field notes, journal entries, and drawings. I also purchased two
sexual assault kits and one strangulation kit. These are the exact brand of equipment used by police and hospitals across America and can be acquired easily from sirche.com\textsuperscript{3}.

My memory artwork visually translates a personal event or memory in a manner that is relatable to the viewer. Relationships with grandparents or favorite older relatives are as relatable as sharing traumatic stories. Sharing familiar stories is a method used during the Civil Rights Movement and adopted by the Women’s Liberation Movement. The stories shared were collected as qualitative data to address better what is commonly called “personal problems” (NWL).

The Rape-Kit Swag-Bag piece represents part of my personal history, creating a space of others to realize they are not alone in their experiences. Often sexual assaults go unreported due to shame, fear, and victim-blaming. I waited five years to report my assault, and though I have since received adequate aid and support, I feel as though I never got my closure. Seeing the rape-kits in black and white allows for a renewed perspective as the only experience a person might have with an assault-kit is under the worst circumstances. The assault-kits displayed as a swag-bag\textsuperscript{4} or parting gift table showcases not only the invasive nature of the examination but also the daunting task of reliving the violation.

Trivializing the rape-kit only furthers the idea of the failures of our government and protective powers to keep women safe and end the rape culture. Showing the rape-kit as a passive, take-home consumable solidifies the devastating commonality of sexual assaults. The second component of the artwork was the 1,000 hand-folded paper cranes. I folded each crane from the forms from each kit. There were not 1,000 blank forms in the assault-kits; the documents were photocopied to equal that amount. Paper cranes folded in the amount of 1,000 is a process that leads to peace and healing.\textsuperscript{5} While the paper crane has its origins in Japanese
origami, the repetitive process of paper folding is akin to traditional women’s crafts such as scrapbooking, embroidery, sewing, etc.

Fig. 1.7. Rape-Kit Swag-Bag detail

Fig. 1.8. Rape-Kit Swag-Bag detail
1.3 MATRILINEALITY

The matrilineal bloodline is not typical pursuance in Western genealogical research. The focus on the patrilineal line yields a severe lack of information about the women in family genealogy. I identify as a woman making it essential for me to elevate the matrilineal line using photographs as a visual connection to the women. I needed to discover where I came from in a historical sense; I needed my questions answered: who birthed my grandmother, and who birthed her? Who birthed us all originally? Who does she resemble? Are we at all alike?
Sociologist Paula Nicholson writes, “[a] strong motive for our apparent absorption in genealogy is that discoveries are part of the ongoing project of the ‘self’—gaining, developing and understanding a sense of who we are” (2). It is possible to “understand a sense of who we are” without detailing one’s matrilineal line. Still, this expansion on the information of my origin reinforced not only my connection to photographs and the women in my family but also strengthened my feminine self.

Why is matrilineality so important? In a genealogical context, it provides complementary information to the patrilineal line. It creates a more holistic understanding of our ancestors. In Sara Lowes’ research, she found that matrilineal societies benefitted the well-being of women and children. “Children of matrilineal women are healthier and better educated, and matrilineal women experience less domestic violence and greater autonomy” (Lowes i). Lowes discusses the difference between the matrilineal and patrilineal lines. While we inherit approximately half of our DNA from our mothers and a half from our fathers, “in matrilineal systems, individuals are considered kin only if they share a common female ancestor” (Lowes 8). In patrilineal systems, individuals are considered kin if they share a common male ancestor. In matrilineal societies, men typically maintain roles of power and authority, yet the father of children does not live in the house of his children. He would live with his mother and sister, being the male role model for his nieces and nephews.

My close relationship with my mother’s side of the family is a window into a matrilineal society. In matrilineal societies, women have more autonomy for decision making, and the bloodline determines inheritance. Coming from patrilineal kinship, exploration of matrilineality through photographs has influenced my feminine side. Still, it has also allowed me to consider the question: What would my family look like if we were in a matrilineal society?
1.3.1. *Time Travel Tree*

![Image of Time Travel Tree]

Fig. 1.10. *Time Travel Tree*, preparation drawing 2018

* * *

If an event occurred in the past without documentation, does it exist? What if multiple people remember the incident? Does that count as documentation? Does a shared memory give credibility to an event? In this example, the variety of memories is a collective origin tale of a tree. Each person’s memory fosters a unique perspective of the story of a tree over time. The piece was installed on the Winter Solstice: Friday, December 21st, 2018. The Winter Solstice is the first astronomical day of winter. Interested in timelines, alternate timelines, and the
possibility of changing time, I have recorded family members’ memories. The solstice provides some “astronomical magic” to aid this process.

Aylah: I always remember that tree being there, in photos and experience. The lowest limb has always been too high up to reach for climbing. Even now, I would need a step-ladder to reach it. I know my mom planted it. She and my grandfather used to tell me the story of how the tree was planted. I don’t really remember more than that. It wasn’t much of a story anyway. I was amazed at the time of hearing about the tree that my mother ever existed as a child. I didn’t care about the tree.

Nana’s interview:

Aylah: When was that tree planted?
Nana: [When your mother was] an early teen, 10, 12, 13 before she moved out of the house.

Aylah: Do you know why she planted it?
Nana: I don’t remember why. I can see her bringing it up from the woods back there. [points south-east behind the house toward the wooded area] So she dug it up, but I don’t know why. There are some things I should remember, not like that, but other things.

Mom’s interview:

Aylah: I’m doing an art project about time travel. Do you remember that tree you planted at Nana’s house? Why and when did you do that?

Mom: Wow! I was about ten, and I planted it for a Mother’s Day gift. I remember finding a small maple tree growing on top of a rock. The roots were a lot deeper in the ground than I thought. I managed, and it’s still there 40ish years later. She loved it.

By the way, it worked, I traveled in time for a minute to two. Thanks.
Aunt’s interview:\textsuperscript{8}

Aylah: Do you remember anything about that tree mom planted out behind Nana’s house?

Aunt: I haven’t got a clue about details. I just remember Papa saying, ‘she had it in her hand, so we planted it.’

I climbed the tree on Nana’s property. I tied two panels of fabric that I knitted from yarn into the tree between the branches. I also hung three suet\textsuperscript{9} orbs from the branches so the near-by animals would have something to eat. Dear, turkeys, and squirrels travel up the backfield to feed every evening thanks to Nana’s neighbor. I anticipated animals being around the installation. I wanted to incorporate a natural element.

My reason for installing Thursday instead of Friday (the actual solstice) was due to a predicted storm. Friday ended up raining. I returned to Nana’s house the following Monday to document the change. The smallest orb was missing, not only the suet but the cage as well. The smallest orb remains unrecovered. My initial response was the excitement that the time travel tree worked! One of the more massive suet orbs had many squirrel nibbles taken out of it.

I returned a final time, seven days later. Both orbs had been eaten, and the cages lay on the ground. One panel of knitted fabric was mangled and had broken free from its tether. As I climbed the tree to take the yarn panels down, my grandmother watched me from the window, worrying I’d fall out of the tree. I did not. She told me she enjoyed watching me install my work around her house. She thought it was interesting, especially when I shared the results of the interviews with her. We were able to share in the memory of the tree several times, creating a new feedback loop of information.

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Fig. 1.11. *Time Travel Tree detail*
Fig. 1.12. *Time Travel Tree* detail
CHAPTER TWO

PHOTOGRAPHS

2.1. PHOTOGRAPHS AS PROMPT

Developing a relationship with a photograph and creating new memories is a necessary step in my research process. A first-hand account from family members to identify family photographs is an ideal method to gain information. When interviewing relatives, I emphasized the oldest photographs in the family collection, as these photographs had the least amount of data attached.

Due in part to my ethical concern of plumbing my elderly relatives for one-sided information\textsuperscript{10}, I felt it was imperative that I shared first and disclosed my motives truthfully. I shared my creative work and research, spent time answering any questions, and talked about my work in graduate school. I allowed my interviewee to call off the interview at any point. In addition to alleviating any ethical dilemma, I continued to maintain an open channel of communication, careful not to spread any family gossip or personal information. I also shared digitized files, photographs, and slides post-interview. The open channel of discussion was a critical step in ensuring an equitable exchange of information and made the experience more relaxed and joyful. This step also prolonged relationships with distant relatives past the interview and created new family synapses.

When interviewing Nana for identification of the people in the old photos, I received a name as well as a relative time period, and I titled the photo based on one of the phrases Nana used, which I found interesting. In Figure 2, Nana can identify her father as a young boy (far right), his older sisters (Beatrice, third from the left and Della, back center with the white hat), and a few other people. She cannot remember with certainty when Fig. 2 was taken as she was
not yet born. Nana was, however, able to identify the subjects based on the memory of her relationship with the photograph. She was also able to identify the landscape, devoid of any landmarks, houses, etc. The background in this image could be any geographic location where snow might fall. Nana informed me that this was Burlington, Maine, a site near her father’s childhood home where the children would often go sledding. The sledding site triggers her fondness of the land and winter activities. As Nana’s story unfolds, the idea that her past is playing a role in her individuality reveals itself. Nana’s “reference to past places and moments in [her life] shows the significance between [herself] and the relation to the events [she is] sharing” (Johnson 11). Nana’s relational memory to this photograph imparts her identity onto the photo, the photo onto her identity, and thus, onto me, a feedback loop to which I am now privy.

* * *

Fig. 2. *Ridge Runners*, Burlington, Maine, 1912.
Nana and I sat at her oak dining room table, photographs spread around, laptops open, looking over family photographs and swapping stories. I handed Nana Figure 2.1 and asked her if she knew any of the people. Treating the image like an investigative clue, Nana scanned the unfamiliar faces and put the possible pieces together. During the interview, Nana recalled great information:

Nana: This person is probably Beatrice’s boyfriend or husband. These people are probably his friends or family. Maybe boyfriends of these other women. I think that might be Della.

Aylah Ireland: Who’s Beatrice?

N: My father’s oldest sister. I think she married a…

AI: Bowers?

N: Yes! That sounds about right.

AI: And Della? Who was she?

N: That was my father’s next oldest sister. She married a Scott.

AI: William Scott, I think. So, where was this photo taken? Do you know the place?

N: Oh, somewhere on The Ridge, I imagine.

AI: What is “The Ridge”?

N: (laughs) It’s just what we called the one road that ran through Burlington. When I was growing up, we called ourselves “The Ridge Runners” (laughs again).

* * *

Pulling from Martha Langford’s theory regarding the effects of photographs on memory, it is vital to recognize the complicated relationship one can have with a photograph.
[The] phenomenological comparison of memory and imagination … correlate these mental activities with processes of photographic reception. … [M]emory’s basis in perception; this condition parallels photography’s indexicality, its dependence on the external world. So tight is this relationship that a revision of memory involves a correction to prior perception: when we discover that things were not as originally perceived, memory is adjusted accordingly (Langford 100).

It is not uncommon for the imagination to play a role in creating memory; the more one analyzes a photograph, the more possible it is for memory to become unreliable as “memory is adjusted.” The reliability of memory is not the main focus of this thesis; I do not wish to dispute the accuracy of memory. I believe these discrepancies are part of the familial narrative and part of the influence on family history and identity.

What is interesting about this photograph are the facts that are missing from Nana’s account. There are two copies of this image in the family collection. They are both postcards, which were never sent but collected and stored as photos. On the back of each image, the location is scrawled in pencil. One postcard image has Beatrice’s name on it. How these images became postcards or who collected them is unknown. It is likely that Beatrice—my great-great Aunt—saved these based solely on the fact that her name is the only one is on the backside. This speculation is a further creation of imagined memory, both truth, and fiction.

Martha Langford describes the imagined memory phenomenon by exploring how people understand memory: “we recognize a mental image as a memory, rather than a perception” because visualizing images is a common practice (4). Langford says the act of photographing “is cutting an image out of the mental pack, and so is collecting” (13). Much like the process of my ancestors making these photographs, my collection of photographs is the building of shared
memory. For me (the collector), Langford continues, “every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopedia of all knowledge of the epoch, the landscape, the industry, and the owner from which it comes” (14). In other words, the “encyclopedia” of family photographs is a tangible representation of memory, a systematic process of preserving and reinforcing present ideals. It is a fixed location when referenced, allows for recall. A place-of-memory is the combination of memory, history, identity, and photographs.

2.1.1. Pierre Nora: Les Lieux de Mémoire

*Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, authored by French historian Pierre Nora, compares the difference, similarities, and the symbiosis between memory and history. What he calls “lieux de mémoire,” translating to places of memory, are “created by a play of memory and history, an interaction of two factors that result in their reciprocal overdetermination [. . .] lieux de mémoire only exists because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications” (19). Nora further describes this as a “[m]obius strip of the collective and the individual” (19). In the latter description, memory equates to the individual, and history to the collective.

Nora’s writing stemmed from his observations that “modernity’s sweeping social and political changes have accelerated history, divided memory, and infiltrated its traditional environments” (Langford 192). Nora believed that the collective French memory had been altered by historians, rendering it indistinguishable from cultural-historical memory. What Nora details, however, is the place between history and memory; the points of contact between memory and history are the places-of-memory. These are the places, objects, and experiences which draw on memory to remind oneself of a historical incident or a past incident that sparks a
memory. The places-of-memory are the works of art created when dealing with one’s memory or history. The places-of-memory are “histories most elementary tools and […] the most symbolic objects of our memory” (Nora 12). If we think of places-of-memory as photographs, then photographs are the most straight-forward representations of our histories and our memories.

Nora goes on: “these lieux de mémoire are . . . the ultimate embodiment of a memorial consciousness [t]hey make their appearance by virtue of the deritualization of our world…a society deeply absorbed in its own transformation and renewal” (12). He outlines the fluidity of the collective identity of France and the importance of lieux de mémoire in defining that identity. Moreover, our need to “deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations” (12) and other recurring activities which do not occur naturally, come from the “sense that there is no spontaneous memory” (12). The need to preserve and record both history and memory have created a demand for places-of-memory, thus creating a feedback loop from the physical into history and memory, maintaining the non-spontaneous memory; conscious memory.

When Nora says we have the “sense there is no spontaneous memory,” he is suggesting that if we apply this to the concept of identity, that the lack of fluidity would make us as fixed and as illusory as a photograph. Nora is describing the intersection of memory/history and identity/photographs. Memory and history assuredly influence identity; their overlap—the places-of-memory—influence identity and feed one another. It is the importance of this fluidity; the Mobius strip mental-image; the feedback loop, which makes identity and art practice so dynamically intertwined. The places-of-memory are underpinned conceptually by the same diverse components as an identity while remaining situated in a contradictory tangibility.
John Gillis writes of the role of the woman in the domestic sphere during and after the Victorian era. Women were the creators and sustainers of places-of-memory.

Women were the ones who facilitated the symbolic communication among family members. They were the ones who told the family stories, remembered the birthdays and anniversaries of distant relatives, organized family holidays, and were most involved in mourning and commemoration. Women became the keepers of the family’s schedule and its calendar. While men’s diaries constituted a record of their own personal accomplishments, women’s diaries, devoted to family events, constituted a running chronicle of marriages, births, and deaths (Gillis 77).

As noted by Nora, we “deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations” (Nora, 12). What Nora failed to mention was who was responsible for this record keeping. As he generalized on a social scale, Nora overlooked the importance of women in the equity of memory/history keeping.

Family photographs can be used as prompts for self-discovery, or, again, as places-of-memory. “Self-consciousness emerges under the sign of that which has already happened, as the fulfillment of something always already begun. We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left. [. . .] There are lieux de mémoire, sites of memory, because there are no longer milieux de memoire,¹² real environments of memory” (Nora 7). Nora expresses the desire for places of memory as substitutes to the real thing, as he states, “real environments of memory” no longer exist. In my case, the family photographs are places-of-memory as they are representing places that can no longer be visited physically, situations that can only be summoned from memory. Family photographs, one component of genealogical research, are windows into the past, creating new memories and invoking preexisting ones. Through reflection and self-
observation, prompted by family photographs, a full picture of one’s sense of self, one’s identity, can emerge.

Langford analyses artists' use of photos to represent memory or aid in memory’s narrative. She recounts “the idea of photographs stimulates the mental process of remembrance, as much or more than photographic objects; that their absence is as powerful as their presence in memory’s state of ‘constant flux’” (Langford 2007; 16, 17). The act of conversation regarding a photograph—the photograph as conversational prompt—is what “stimulates the mental process of remembrance” more so than looking. When communication occurs between two or more people, it impacts on their identities.

2.1.2. Martha Langford: Scissors, Paper, Stone

Martha Langford has thirty years of experience in contemporary Canadian photography as a practitioner, a curator, a critic, a theorist, and a historian (Langford 2007; 9). In her experience with contemporary photography, she has complied multiple theoretical and analytical essays, including in her book Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art, discussing the question: “Is photography an art of memory?” (Langford 2007; 9). I think she is asking a question with two interpretations: “is photography an art of memory?” as in is photography the art-form of memory, and “is photography an art of memory?” substituting photographs as the record of memory. In other words, are photographs the art medium, which best represents the ultimate record for memory?

Langford never makes any declarations regarding whether photography is an “art of memory” or not. Still, she does imply that photographs are effectively used by artists to represent themes of memory. Langford provides examples of artists using photographs as a means of
constructing memory and states: “[t]o say that any two things are the same sets those elements on a balance.” For balance to occur, “nothing can be added to either tray” (Langford 2007; 287). Using Pierre Nora’s theory of lieu de mémoire, Langford guides the thinking of balance between photo and memory, between history and identity.

Langford directly addresses her original question: “I am not going back and saying photographs are memories, I am saying that we have powerful memories of photographs that circulate with our mental images of the visible world. An artist who can express this fluid condition can be said to be expressing memory. The construct is cultural” (Langford 2007; 288, 289). The representational nature of photographs is intrinsically linked to memory, thus making photographs linked with identity. Identity is a construct of the mind: memory (internal) tangling with history and experience (external). Photographs as “art of memory” represent a version of that tangle, or balance, between memory and history. They are external objects which trigger the internal.

Langford closes her book by referencing memoriography, a term coined by Jacques Le Goff, a French theorist who worked with Pierre Nora in the field of memory. “Memory as a study of collective mentality provides a comprehensive view of culture and society that is so often missing in the history of memory whose fragmentary tendency is to focus on distinct memories” (Confino 81). The connection to photographs is made for us by Langford. “I see memoriography as the history of our photographic habits of attention” (Langford 2007; 289). In other words, Langford is using photographs as a methodology to examine how we comprehensively view the “culture and society that is so often missing in the history of memory” (Confino 81).
To support this, Langford has outlined multiple artists and their photographic/memory work.

The artists who do the memory-work for us have attended, consciously or unconsciously, to the *ecology* of mental images. Their work makes a place for psychological participation; I have to respond in kind. As a *memoriographer* I must include my *being* with the image, the factors of co-presence that have mattered to me, and therefore shaped what I have retained as an image. The work before me is the materialization of a thought that is now *partially* mine (Langford 2007; 289).

Langford speaks of her participation in the work based on her inclusion of her own subjective experience effecting how she views the work. As a *memoriographer*, she analyses the photographic work, not in the physical (external) but in the abstract (internal). Perhaps unintentionally, Langford interprets the works of artists who deal in memory as places-of-memory. “The photographic witness says, ‘This is what I saw,’ while the photographic memory-worker says, ‘This is how I remember it’” (Langford 2007; 289). The “photographic witness” deals in the physical while the “photographic memory-worker” deals in the abstract, bringing more meaning to the artwork by relating subjectively to the artwork. Photographic memory-work is the manner of achieving places-of-memory, the connection of the work to the viewer in a subjective way, the artists and viewer relating on a personal, internal level. This intimate connection of photographs on memory mirrors the surrounding culture. It is not to say that all works of art do or can make an intimate connection as a viewer to photographic artwork. There is, however, an expectation that cultures that have a deep connection with photographs likely understand that “we have powerful memories of photographs that circulate with our mental images of the visible world” (Langford 2007; 288).
2.1.3. Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag

There is plenty of writings that reference Barthes’ and Sontag’s thoughts on photographs. I have combined the theories of Barthes and Sontag in one section as their arguments are points of origin for many other photo theorists. Barthes and Sontag supplement each other’s works, creating an academic unit from which I can draw ideas regarding the tension between truth and fiction.

Examination of Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* reveals his belief in the affect-quality of photographs. “The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being” (80). Barthes’ theory of the photographic object as a referent to the real body speaks of the biological connection to ancestors despite the generational separation. There is an authenticity in a historical photograph of one’s ancestor, but there does exist a disconnect. The disconnect exists in the lack of familiarity with the ancestor. In his example, Barthes writes of a photograph of his mother as a child. He, of course, never knew his mother when she was a child, yet remembers her as his mother. He reflects upon the photo concerning memory: “[n]ot only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory, but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes counter-memory” (Barthes 91). Instead of considering the photograph as blocking memory or substituting memory, the counter-memory quality of photographs is the disconnect in the lack of familiarity with our ancestors.

Keeping with Barthes's example of the photograph of his mother as a child, it is difficult to comprehend our parents were ever children; indeed, we have no memories of this, only photographic evidence that we must receive as truth. The photograph exists in our minds as truth and fiction. As Barthes and I trust in the truth of the photo, the disconnect is the underlying
feeling that the photo is fiction. It is fiction to us; our parent as a child is fiction without the trust in the photograph. Barthes reads the photograph as a “bizarre medium, a new form of hallucination” (Barthes 115), which perceptually is false and temporally true. A photograph is a “temporal hallucination…chafed by reality” (115).

Regarding photos of family ancestors, we know the photo to be a representation of its time, yet unreachable by our perceptions and experiences. I cannot speak to my fifth great-grandmother, but I can see her in a photo. She is both truth and fiction.

Separately, Barthes and Sontag further discuss the tension between truth and fiction. Sontag regards the history of family and photographs as a balance between truth and fiction:

Photography becomes a rite of family life just when, in the industrializing countries of Europe and America, the very institution of family starts undergoing radical surgery. As that claustrophobic unit, the nuclear family, was being carved out of a much larger family aggregate, photography came along to memorialize, to restate symbolically, the imperiled continuity and vanishing extendedness of family life (Sontag 22).

Sontag speaks of photographs as preserving the definition of the family before that of the nuclear family. While seeming to focus on the history and changes the family underwent in the 20th century, Sontag indicates that the balance of truth and fiction of photographs shifts at this moment toward fiction. Photographs of the extended family are added to the family album to keep the family together. The photographs are genealogical truths; the subjects are indeed family members, yet they are also fictions; the nuclear family is a small isolated unit removed from the extended family.

Barthes’ reveals his uncertainty toward photographs in Marianne Hirsch’s *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory:*
Unlike other representational forms, Barthes insists, photography holds a unique relation to the real, defined not through the discourse of artists representation, but that of magic, alchemy, indexicality and fetishism: “I call ‘photographic referent’ not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be not photograph” (Hirsch 4).

Barthes knows there *is* a truth to a photograph, an evidentiary quality, but the tension between truth and fiction exists because we have added the emotional connections to photographs imbuing photographs with “magic” and “fetishism.” Barthes discusses his indirect trust in the truth of photographs by continuing with his familial relationship to the subjects of the photographs, i.e., his mother as a child. “Lineage reveals an identity stronger, more interesting than legal status—more reassuring as well, for the thought of origins soothes us, whereas that of the future disturbs us, agonizes us” (Barthes 105). He imbues personal photographs with nostalgia, referring to them as “reassuring” and “soothing,” which pulls him away from the truth. Nostalgia is often an intentionally fictitious shift in perspective to maintain a positive emotional connection to memory.
2.1.4. Linda Fregni Nagler

Milan-based artist and photographer of photographs, Linda Fregni Nagler, has been collecting anonymous old photographs from antique shops and through gifts/donations from family and friends for over twenty years. Amassed in her collection, Nagler began to see patterns evolving into categories of the image subjects. “With the added distance of time and culture, the images take on new connotations as she appropriates them or re-photographs them herself” (Artsy). Organizing and separating her photograph collection based on interesting patterns, Nagler focuses on the mother as an object. The photographs depict truth and fiction.

Nagler’s *The Hidden Mother* series (Fig. 2.2) is a collection of these found photograph portraits of children who are being held by their mothers; the mothers in the images are entirely covered in fabric or drapes to “anonymously cradle the subject of the commission” (Claxton). In this body of work, Nagler has “curated and defined a poignant new archive on the discourse of motherhood and of maternal absence. The repetitive gesture that lays at the centre of this narrative may be bound to the technical inadequacies of the medium at the time, but in denying themselves, these mothers speak vividly to the contemporary role of women in society” (Claxton). The mother hides her identity for the sake of the childhood portrait. The mother is required as a prop in the photo session to hold the child still for the duration of the long exposure time. It is ironic, however, that the mother is required in the image to comfort the child without being important enough to be uncovered and an active participant in the

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photograph. Covered with a drape, she remains a passive, submissive figure whose only purpose is to blend in and support her child. The “hidden mother” embodies the fiction in the truthful portrait of the child. She personifies the role of mother in all stereotypical facts, losing part of herself, her identity, bestowing it unto her child, and preserving this moment in time as photographic evidence.

*The Hidden Mother* series is a metaphor for the missing information regarding women in genealogical work. While it is apparent that these women must have existed beyond birth and death dates, the viewer of the images—or the family historian—is “asked to suspend their disbelief, to ‘not see’ the hidden figure” (“The Hidden Mother”). The images ask specifically for the mothers to be omitted; in genealogy work, the women are not asked to be hidden but are often rendered as ghostly by way of documentation. They are given a cursory outline and never completely given substance; their identities are incomplete. Ancestral women are represented as treading the waters of existence long enough to procreate, before slipping into the oblivion of documentation. The limited information in my own family parallels with that of the individual hidden mother; the general outline of her is documented, she existed in time to birth and support her children, passively, without having any apparent value enough to be “photographed” herself. She is documented as an object, if at all: the man’s wife, the child’s mother, the father’s daughter, etc.

Nagler’s use of the found-photograph connects to my work in that to some degree, my images, even though they are family photographs, are found-photographs, depicting strangers. Nagler’s ability to organize and curate these images to create places-of-memory and fresh perspective is the strength in the artwork. Individually, each photo does not have enough information to draw the necessary attention or shift the viewer’s perspective. Nagler’s ability to
isolate patterns in her extensive database of photographs creates a place-of-memory which gives the value and distinction of the photograph.

2.1.5. *Tea Party of Ghosts*

I cannot recall a time in my life where I was not obsessed with family photographs. I would arrange the images in albums, collages and place like-images together. These patterns of the organization I unconsciously created were the impetus for much of my artwork. In the following example, a pile of like-images, driven by the concept of altering the perspective and ideas of the domestic space, I created a place-of-memory, an “ultimate embodiment of a memorial unconsciousness” (Nora 12). The piece is a memorial of the endless labor of the women depicted in the portraits.

Finding photographs tucked away in cardboard folders were a selection of eight senior portraits of women from the 1950s. I felt compelled to preserve these images physically and memorialize them conceptually. To showcase the photos which would likely not be displayed every again, I designed a project around what it means to be a housewife. Struggling with my value as a mother and wife, I was angry that the time and labor of homemakers are not rewarded monetarily, and often invalidated by society. There still exists a struggle to prove the value of “women’s work.” An enormous amount of effort goes into repetitive activities to create the illusion of simplicity and effortlessness.

Emphasizing the repetition, which yields the illusion of simplicity in the final product, I embroidered eight flour-sac tea-towels with the images of the senior portraits. The towels are installed around a white dining table, paired with 1950’s milk-glass dinnerware inherited from my grandmother (Fig. 2.3). This somber celebration of that trivialized labor memorialized the
work of the women depicted; the women from the senior portraits, all of whom were confirmed to be mothers, wives, and homemakers. The *Tea Party of Ghosts* is both practical and pristine, “banal and extraordinary” (Nora 24). The artwork is a poignant representation of trivializing women’s labor.

* * *

Coming from poor, French-Irish, farming families, graduating high school was not common for boys and less so for girls. Nana was in her adolescent years; her mother insisted she finish high school. Nana hated school, but she juggled it with a part-time job to help keep the family afloat. Her mother worked as a washwoman around town and did odd jobs to provide for her children, four of whom still lived at home, and two had families of their own. Nana’s father was an alcoholic and untrustworthy with money when he was around. In 1955, Nana received her high school diploma.

In a box, she kept her diploma with a black and white senior portrait; these were accompanied by many other senior portraits of family members over the years. Sixty years later,
I found this box. I was impressed by the number of women in the family who graduated, some of whom went on to college.

These black-and-white high school graduation portraits of women in my family need to be celebrated. The accomplishment must be acknowledged lest they are left to rot in a box. Using a fiber medium marries the idea of women’s work with what women can accomplish. All these women are tied together by blood, more importantly, by achievements that now seem underwhelming, but were once not always realistic or available.

* * *

During the act of embroidering these towels, I shared them with my grandmother. I asked her to identify the portraits and tell me about the women. Graduating from Lee Academy decades before it became an international boarding high school, Nana was able to stay in touch with most of her graduating class as they remained in the surrounding towns. “Photography develops identity formation when communication is used to describe the photograph. This communication is known to ‘help to bridge the gap between generations and create a new layer of understanding in the family history’” (Langford qtd. in Johnson 9). If we transpose “communication” with “artwork,” then it could be said that these embroideries bridge generational gaps, inform identity, and supplement genealogical documentation of my family.

The senior portraits can be viewed now in multiple contexts: as-is, representing the documentation achievement of women graduating high school, and as an artistic piece, which emphasizes the domestic. The artwork continues the narrative of each woman, allowing the viewer to imagine more about them, imagine sharing a meal with them.
Fig. 2.4. *Tea Party of Ghosts* detail

Fig. 2.5. *Tea Party of Ghosts* detail

Fig. 2.6. *Tea Party of Ghosts* detail
2.2. MY MOVE TO CYANOTYPE: A BIT OF BACKGROUND

Cyanotype is an alternative photo-process and is also referred to as “sun-printing.” A solution of potassium ferricyanide and a solution of ferric ammonium citrate is mixed in a 1:1 ration (Cyanotype Archive). The chemical is brushed onto a porous surface, such as paper or fabric. Once dry, the yellowish-greenish surface is exposed to the sun or an artificial ultra-violet light source. Similar to light-sensitive photo paper, if a film negative or an object is placed on the surface, the UV light will expose the chemically coated areas which are exposed. Once the image is exposed on the cyanotype surface, rinsing the coated surface in a water bath will develop and fix the image.

The cyanotype process has a similar quality to that of the lifecycle: conception, birth, and life. Martha Langford’s analyses Roland Barthes’ cognate argument—regarding the photograph’s position as a metaphor for the lifecycle—in her book, *Paper, Scissor, Stone.* “Barthes makes photography—taking the picture, developing it, printing and looking at it, reading it and writing about it—inherently familial and material, akin to the very process of life and death” (Langford 4, 5). Posing the analog photo process as having a metaphorical, maternal component of conception, birth, and life through the exposure of the film onto light-sensitive paper (conception), development (birth), and seeing the print (life), mirror identity construction. The points of contact between photographs and identity are discussed in later chapters.

Creating a connection between myself and each female ancestor began with a photograph. Interpreting these photographs using a historic process like cyanotype printing is indicative of film-based (analog) photographs. Without possessing the original film from all my family photos, I had to create my own film negatives. Creating my film from existing images involved digitizing the photographs and printing them onto a transparent substrate via an inkjet printer. The materials, techniques, and years of division between myself and my oldest
photographed great-grandmother unite us in the present, and I can renew her portrait through recreation.

2.2.1. Meghann Riepenhoff

A Washington based artist, Meghann Riepenhoff’s cyanotype work explores the relationship between humans and the “landscape, the sublime, time and impermanence” (Riepenhoff). As an alternative photo process, cyanotype has chemical properties that make it susceptible to light and water. She uses this alternative photo process without a camera and photographs, creating documentation of the relationship between light and water. The works become places-of-memory for the experiences of nature existing in the viewer.

Exposing and developing her prints simultaneously, Riepenhoff can capture the elemental effects of the water on the cyanotype chemical. As the pieces hang in the gallery, museum, or sit in storage, the cyanotype prints change based on their exposure to light and moisture. The ephemeral nature of her work is akin to that of the temporary nature of memory; Riepenhoff records the memories of waves in the ocean, and raindrops in a storm.

Interviewed by Conor Risch for Photo District News magazine, Riepenhoff’s work was described cohesively. “The interrelation of the salt of the ocean and the blue of the sea and sky, with the iron salt and blue of the cyanotype also ties the form and content of the works together” (Risch). The abstraction in the visual work becomes a visual metaphor for Riepenhoff’s search for the ephemeral. She explained in the interview: “It was really important that the material was wrapped up in the concept and that the content expressed itself directly through the material” (Risch). Her choice of medium suits the concept; by using a camera-less process, her cyanotypes evolve and change much like the relationships between humans and nature.
Colleague Richard Misrach describes Riepenhoff’s work: “Hers are not pristine photographs behind glass that have been cleaned up. They’re actually messy, like life. It’s not only the perfect metaphor, but it’s special in the sense of how rare is it to witness so much of the process embedded in the work. You don’t see that often in the art world” (Zach). Misrach’s interviewer, Jessica Zach, continues, “Nor does one often see artwork for sale (and held in numerous well-known collections) that will remain unpredictably mutable over time.”

Riepenhoff has challenged the notions of photography, using its ability to record, challenged the art world, and been successful.

Riepenhoff’s conceptual work of “change and impermanence” mirrors the plasticity of identity, creating a feedback loop that informs her work (Zach). The excitement of the viewer and artist experiencing the artwork grow and evolve establishes a connection achieved through cyanotype. It allows an atmosphere for a conversation about the work.

Using Riepenhoff as inspiration for my work, I found that cyanotype, paired with family photographs, turns the conversation toward “[bridging] the gap between generations,” creating a

“new layer of understanding in the family history” as Langford observed above. This conversation aids in the “development of identity formation” by adding new information and memory (Langford 9).

2.2.2. **Bathroom Doors**

As an exercise in recording banality and routine, I photographed the bathroom or stall doors of each different bathroom I used for one year. I collected a total of 54 images from Maine to Washington state. The photographic project resulted in two iterations, one being a compilation video and a bathroom doors magazine. The second iteration evolved into film negatives and cyanotype. Regardless of medium, the idea of privacy was a topic that made some viewers uncomfortable. In a handful of images, a blurred reflection is visible.

This photographic series leans more toward truth than fiction. The depiction of truth is in the honesty involved in adhering to the rules set for this project. I did not repeat the same bathroom door, I had to use my phone camera, I had to make more of an effort to use public

![Fig. 2.8. Bathroom Door # 11](image1.png)

![Fig. 2.9. Bathroom Door # 27](image2.png)
bathrooms, and I kept the photos in numerical order. The series reflected a scattered sequence of private moments that are not typically shared. Nora mentions the need to “deliberately create archives” of recurring activities (12). *Bathroom Doors* interprets deliberately archived, recurring events which are not common. Recurring activities are not limited to, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. *Bathroom Doors* is a universal event, possibly not even described as an event.

The second iteration of *Bathroom Doors* converted the images into film and printed them onto cyanotype coated fabric. The completed piece contained each negative hung in rows over the cyanotype printed material (Fig. 2.10). The negative added to the print invited the viewer to flip the film up to look underneath. The suggestion for this action reflects an equivalent level of intimacy disclosed by the artist. Due to this intimacy, the viewers shared their connection to the fleeting, private moments in the bathroom. *Bathroom Doors* makes the unseen act seen, making the private public, exposing the use of the phones in the bathroom, the recording of me-time.

![Image](image_url)

Fig. 2.10. *Bathroom Doors* cyanotype process
(indicated as self-care), and elevating a commonplace event as art. Making the unseen seen, making the private-public and self-care emerge from the Women’s Liberation Movement.

Fig. 2.11. *Bathroom Doors*, 2019. Photo by Jim Winters.
CHAPTER THREE

IDENTITY

3.1. PAULA NICHOLSON: GENEALOGY, PSYCHOLOGY, AND IDENTITY

Dr. Paula Nicolson, a sociologist and retired professor of women’s psychology, health, and gender-power relations, discusses the “importance of genealogy in the development of identity” (fourth cover) in her book Genealogy, Psychology and Identity: Tales from a Family Tree. She says: “Narratives of selfhood are effectively the cement to bind our self-presentation so that attempts to make sense of our family history and its influence on identity are for many of us part of this process” (Nicolson 15). Nicolson and I agree that the information we gain from our family histories is integrated into our sense of self and bound to the presumed identities of our ancestors.

The formation of identity comes “[t]hrough self-inspection, self-problematization, self-monitoring, and confession, we evaluate ourselves according to the criteria provided for us by others” (Nicolson 17). A constant tension between the internal and external forces of an individual is what creates a fluid sense of self. As we incorporate external information internally, then express it externally, we influence our environment. We influence our environment, which influences us, is similar to that of Nora’s Mobius strip idea, the feedback loop, a system operating in and around ourselves, mirrored in the operations of the places-of-memory. Identity, however, does not appear suddenly; it begins in the infancy stage when we expose the senses to the external world. “Attachment and psychological development theories are key components in the ways family behaviours, values and practices have profound influence throughout life”
(Nicolson 57). When we attach ourselves to our parents or caregivers, ultimately, our identities are influenced by them.

Nicolson provides “key factors which strongly influence the transmission of family culture through generations” (57). These factors can also be interpreted as how we can receive parts of our identities across generations and why/how genealogy can be influential on identity. First, “We obey instructions given by those figures we believe have power and authority over us. Thus for generations, patriarch or the rule of the father, has taken precedence in the family” (57). The “rule of the father” is valid predominantly for Eurocentric, heterosexual cultures; the patriarchal head of the family has all but outlasted many matriarchal societies. Secondly, from infancy, we become attached to whom we are the closest. Those with whom we are attached influence our lives (Nicolson 57). In the family system, attachments form, creating a lifelong positive or negative bond. For example, my bond with my maternal grandmother certainly influenced my research. Additionally, my scrutiny regarding “the rule of the father” hardly aligned with my female relationships. The motivation to seek an alternative to or an addendum to the patrilineal model (specifically in my family history) led me to pursue my matrilineal line.

I have emphasized only some of Nicolson’s key factors to illuminate the feedback-loop-like quality of the influence of our family history on ourselves. This Mobius strip of emotion and behavior shapes who we are as people and who we are likely to be as parents. Regarding my artistic practice, it is my interest in this feedback loop, which causes me to experiment with ways to disrupt that cycle. Using the model of place-of-memory, I can emphasize either the truth or the fiction to create a different context for the work. Toward the end of this chapter, I will show some of my early work, which continues the cycle and relies on truth; in Chapter four, my work shifts toward fictitious places-of-memory, disrupting the cycle.
3.2. AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that uses critical self-reflection and writing to explore personal experience and connect it to broader cultural, political, and social understandings. Tony Adams writes, “[i]n doing autoethnography, we confront ‘the tension between insider and outsider perspectives, between social practice and social constraint’” (Adams 2014), thus creating a subjective oriented research method which can challenge objective-style research methods.

In the same vein as autoethnography, historian Liz Gloyn writes about the significance of family archives. She argues that “historians are able to value and recognize the more messy types of knowledge held within social groupings such as families rather than relying solely on the ‘objective’ knowledge of the professional institution: the change of perspective allows new avenues for learning about the past to emerge” (158). My “messy” family archive has one foot in the area of historical significance and the other foot in identity influence; the family archive is an intersectional reservoir sustaining my art practice.

Autoethnography and autobiographical research are critical when discussing one’s family history, especially when there are few other resources for first-person accounts regarding century-old photographs and documents. An autoethnographic approach to genealogical research will contribute to a broader cultural understanding of the influence of family history on self-identity, framed through a feminist perspective by grappling with the current patrilineal model.

Individual family members influence the overall family memory when sharing stories aloud over a single or group of photos with another family member. Family memory can perpetuate individual behaviors and identities, as mentioned in the previous section. Sociologist Sahika Erkonan argues, “[w]ith the aid of ethnographic techniques, researchers can understand
how family memory and family image are constructed, and how the family members remember such constructions through photography” (Erkonan 259). On a more significant, cultural scale, family dynamics, behaviors, and identities can have an impact on, and be impacted by the society around it. Family dynamics can cause repeated behavior persisting for multiple generations, such as the tradition of patrilineal precedence, where women take the man’s last name in heterosexual marriages.

3.2.1. Carol Rambo: The Layered Account

Sociologist Carol Rambo uses autoethnography as a methodology to discuss family history, trauma, and identity. In her early writings, Rambo makes a case for using the layered-account model in an autoethnographic approach to sociology. The layered-account allows her to use her personal experience qualitatively, breaking out of “conventional writing formats by integrating abstract theoretical thinking, introspection, emotional experience, fantasies, dreams and statistics” (Ronai 395). In other words, her academic writing has the essence of two voices: one being analytical and one being anecdotal. The fusing of the two voices produces one piece of writing that details factual information with emotional underpinnings. Rambo’s articles were some of the most potent and relatable academic writing I have yet to come across.

In Impressions of Grandmother, Rambo uses her art practice, sociology background, and memories of her grandmother to create a case for the influence of her grandmother on her identity formation. “Through reflexivity and introspection, this autoethnography will show how the impressions of my grandmother left with me manifest in me” (Rambo 563). Through the layered account, “a postmodern ethnographic reporting technique that embodies a theory of consciousness and a method of reporting in one stroke,” and her art practice, Rambo uses self-
reflection as one method to analyze her tumultuous relationship with her grandmother (Ronai 396).

Rambo writes of the layered account as a technique which “offers an impressionistic sketch, handing readers layers of experience so they may fill in the spaces and construct an interpretation of the writer’s narrative. The reader reconstructs the subject, thus projecting more of themselves into it, and taking more away from it” (Ronai 396). Autoethnography is a technique used in ethnological research where one uses personal experiences to relate to a larger, cultural gamut of experiences.

Tony Adams, the co-author of *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research*, writes of the layered account as a method, “which juxtapose[s] fragments of experience, memories, introspection, research, theory, and other texts. Layered accounts reflect and refract the relationship between personal/cultural experience and interpretation/analysis” (57). The interpretation of one’s narrative provides a zoomed-in view of the surrounding cultural context.

In *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, Annette Kuhn uses the layered account technique, using photographs as tangible points of reference for her identity formation. “Telling stories about the past, our past, is a key moment in the making of our selves. To the extent that memory provides their raw material, such narratives of identity are shaped as much by what is left out of the account—whether forgotten or repressed—as by what is actually told” (2). The layered account is a window into identity and family history. These inclusions or exclusions of the account shed light on how Paula Nicolson’s key factors of “transmissions of family culture on multiple generations” (57). The family culture likely influences the patterns of inclusion or exclusion of memories.
Paired with the layered account, part of Rambo’s research involved interviews and conversations with other family members, particularly her aunt, who had a unique insight into her grandmother’s history as well as Rambo’s. Rambo’s aunt pointed out their shared qualities of assertiveness and eccentricity. This small piece of information from her aunt arose as an accidental collaboration via interview, which unlocked a perspective of Rambo’s experience, which was unable to be achieved with self-observation alone.

Rambo uses the metaphor of “impressions forming grooves and ruts” in our identities to help shape the evolving sense of self. This thought parallels her art practice in the gestures of drawing and painting. Our experiences shape us and illuminate a sense of self, which slowly emerges like that of a developing photograph. These left “traces and impressions” (564) of the grandmother, through experience and family lore, have allowed Rambo to construct her “identity in relation to her grandmother” (564). Rambo can identify the underpinnings of her personality, which mirror those of her grandmother’s. She describes without showing drawings and paintings of her grandmother she made during the writing of Impressions of Grandmother. As she creates a portrait of her grandmother either with writing or with paint, Rambo is subsequently painting a picture of herself.

Rambo’s connection to her grandmother is an academic blind spot. She says: “[v]ery little exists in the literature regarding grandmothers and their impact on the identity formation of their grandchildren” (565). She continues, “the examination of the grandmother’s role in identity formation is largely invisible in psychoanalytic theory and research due to Freud’s emphasis on sexuality” (565). In other words, grandmothers are beyond childbearing years, making her unfit for analysis. Using an autoethnographic approach to her identity research, Rambo was also able
to cast her relationship with her grandmother into the academic arena, allowing for other scholars to consider the same.

3.2.2. *Phantom Overload*

My scrutiny regarding “the rule of the father” comes through in some of my work (Nicolson 57). In the patrilineal model, when applied to the family, the men take center stage. No matter the wrong-doings of the men, the women are expected to forgive and forget, perpetuating toxic relationships. In an effort to change the cycle of abuse in my family, I embroidered two bedsheets with letters my father wrote.

Fig. 3. *Phantom Overload* detail
Parents set the tone of a daughter’s womanhood. When a relationship is toxic, non-reciprocal, or non-existent, the bond is broken. Regarding my father, I have exhausted myself seeking to mend the fissure. As I grew into a woman and motherhood, I made the agonizing choice to sever ties in an attempt at self-preservation. For the rest of my life, I will be decoding the tangled illusion my father created. The backsides of the artworks are free to be explored, showing the tangles of the embroidery.

* * *

*Phantom Overload* was a title chosen to reflect a lesson my father insisted on reiterating daily. He would point to the red light on the VCR, TV, or any other household appliance that had this light and say, “you see that light? Even though the [device] is off, it is still conducting electricity; it’s called a phantom load”. He would stress the ‘o’ in load, which I thought was strange and likely why I remembered it for so long. Standby power, as it is more commonly called, is a concept I felt that existed in my relationship with my father. When I thought we had resolved our issues, he was waiting, fully charged, ready to attack.

* * *

The constant reminders of my father’s abuse and power were reflected in the letters he sent. They were places-of-memory I would receive unsolicited and without warning. *Phantom Overload* creates a method of consciousness-raising, which helped recharge my power.
Fig. 3.1. *Phantom Overload*, 2018

Fig. 3.2. *Phantom Overload* detail

Fig. 3.3. *Phantom Overload* detail
3.2.3. *Sanction*

*Sanction* was a piece that continued with the ideas of what “women’s work” means. The word sanction is a Janus word, meaning it is a word that had two opposing definitions. As a noun, sanction means penalty or reward. Based on Sylvia Federici’s writing on women’s labor and sexuality, it was apparent that Sexuality can be work for women.

In a patriarchal culture, one role of the wife/woman in a heteronormative sexual relationship has been to serve the man. Through the feminist movements and ideas of sexual liberation, there is a belief that sex is no longer “work” for women. Federici says, “sexual liberation has intensified [women’s] work” (25). Women not only have the right to sex but “the duty to have sex and enjoy it” (25). Unfortunately, “what comes out when [women] ‘let go’ is
more often [their] repressed frustration and violence than [their] hidden-self ready to be born in bed” (26). Federici’s implications of what women’s sexuality has become are similar to that of the Janus word: “duty” and “enjoy” are in opposition.

The creation and exhibiting of Sanction came in the spring of 2018 when the #metoo movement was constantly in the news. Coming forward and sharing painful stories united a community of victimized women. There are more nuanced components to women’s sexuality concerning consent. Inside a marriage or a committed relationship, there do exist issues of consent. Sanction is an installation that set to appear as the day-after a sexual event. Given the conflicting title, the viewer can interpret the scene as either consensual or not. This freedom also allows the viewer to draw on their personal experiences coming to their own conclusions, which leads to discussions. Sanction is a place-of-memory. Good or bad, the viewer decides.

Fig. 3.5. Sanction detail

Fig. 3.6. Sanction detail
3.3. A STORY OF NANA’S HOUSE

*   *   *

After my grandfather's death, Nana wished to sell the house and move to Florida near her two sisters, escaping the devastating Maine winters. Several family members, myself included, took on the daunting task of emptying the home in preparation to sell. During this process, Nana bought a house and Florida and was ready to move on. After six months in Florida, Nana decided she hated Florida and moved back to Maine. She sold the Florida house and moved back into her unsold Maine house. The house remained empty of objects save for the staging furniture.
Witnessing Nana living in the same house void of objects linked to her past was both odd and comforting. It was comforting because she was able to adjust well and have her fresh start without the constant external reminders of her past, but strange. After all, despite the missing objects which might hold sentimental value, the memories were still lingering in the house. There were moments I observed where Nana would almost forget she had ever left and reach for an object which was no longer there, racking her brain for the misplaced item. I was uncomfortable with the empty room. The emptiness embodied the loss of my grandfather in an overwhelming way.

With Nana’s permission, I began a project to fill some of the empty rooms with art installations. Filling the space with conceptual art with themes of memory, history, and loss, was an effort to remind my grandmother and me that even though the objects and my grandfather were not there, the memories still are. The following is the first piece I installed in my grandmother’s house and the first intentional place-of-memory.

* * *

3.3.1. *Cobwebs I & II*

When I would visit my grandparent’s house, I would spend time sitting on the glassed-in porch. Now empty, the light-green painted wood-paneled walls match the Astroturf floor. These are the only reminders of the space, and yet they trigger few memories. The room was once filled with furniture, seasonal clothing storage, and arts-and-crafts made by myself, sister, and cousins over the years. If I close my eyes, I could visualize the missing objects and accompanying memories.
Cobwebs I was the first installation in an empty room of Nana’s house (Fig 3.11). I installed a 12-foot by 8-foot panel of knitted yellow yarn. Installing Cobwebs I in the center of the porch at varying height levels made the artwork available to be traversed if the visitor bent and maneuvered around the yarn. Post-installation, I would lay under the yarn panels looking up at the patterns the shadows created on the wall and ceiling.

I remembered how difficult emptying the house was after the death of my grandfather. Being in the empty porch was equally as painful. It felt as though my grandfather had been erased despite that not being the case.

![Fig. 3.8. Cobwebs I detail](image)

Cobwebs II was installed a month later at the end of the ‘L’ shaped porch. Consisting of yellow yarn sculptures and several knitted yarn panels which matched Cobwebs I, the installation was pinned to the architecture resembling a cobweb structure. The obvious metaphor of cobwebs in this empty room paired with the cluttered, overstimulating installation triggered the memories that the Astroturf alone could not. The idea of cobwebs symbolizes the space’s emptiness and lack of use.
Inspired by *Womanhouse*, a 1970’s art installation directed by Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago\(^5\), I felt this space could be my family’s own “Woman House.” Chicago explains, “Womanhouse became both an environment that housed the work of women artists working out of their own experiences and the ‘house’ of female reality into which one entered to experience the real facts of women’s lives, feelings, and concerns” (Raven 48). Instead of being a collaborative environment for female artists, the installation was an homage to and celebration of being a woman in my family. *Cobwebs I & II* memorialize the death of the family’s patriarch yet is not counterintuitive to feminist theory. The installation was a much more in-depth process of creating a memorial and using my art practice as a way to inform my research. It was “[a] ‘learning by doing’ educational method at Womanhouse put into practice the psychological self-discoveries offered by the consciousness-raising format of the woman’s movement” (Raven 50). The ‘learning by doing’ method dovetails my research with my art practice.

Fig. 3.9. *Cobwebs II*
I must remind the reader that my grandmother’s house is not so much “like” *Womanhouse* beyond the fact that it is a house, and I identify as a woman. *Womanhouse* was an inspirational example of moving away from the gallery setting and finding a space that would enhance the intricacies of family, domesticity, and in my case, memory.

*Cobwebs I & II* were in part places-of-memory and part memorial. Nana’s house itself is a place-of-memory. John Gillis wrote of the historical changes in the family from the Victorian era into the twentieth century about photographs. “The house became a status symbol and, more important, a memory palace, the repository of all that united families mentally even when they were physically apart” (Gillis 75). Nana’s house is the meeting place for family members; it is the place I often visit physically and in dreams. In modern, horoscope-like dream-dictionaries, the house represents one’s soul and or self (House), and each room symbolizes aspects of one’s psyche. Freud’s assessment of the “house” was not far from this interpretation, yet more general and yielding to the commonality of the “house” in dreams representing the physical organism of the person (Freud 73). Both Freud and Gillis wrote about the time period when families were growing apart in Western culture. The clinging to the house feels representational for the family.
is a cultural phenomenon manifesting in myself as I struggled to create my identity concerning my own family.

Fig. 3.11. Cobwebs I. 2019.
CHAPTER FOUR

MATRILINEALITY

Matrilineality is the lineage of descendants traced through one’s female bloodline; patrilineage is the father’s bloodline. Researching our matrilineal sides can create a complete family history. Sharing and learning from the women of previous generations is an exploration into the family line, which is often lost or forgotten. “Our grandmothers and mothers are full of stories” (Maglin, 889). It is not to say our grandfathers and fathers are not full of stories; the matrilineal accounts likely differ from our patrilineal stories. It is essential to break the exclusivity cycle of patrilineality. Our parents and grandparents have continued the patrilineal line because it is a cultural norm. “Thinking genealogically therefore it is likely that the unconscious experiences of our parents and grandparents will in turn have shaped theirs and consequently our own psychosocial development” (Nicolson 22). That is to say that researching and exploring the stories our grandmothers and mothers tell will provide insight into their lives, the critical moments which impacted them, and how those moments created a ripple effect on our lives.

Dr. Nan Bauer-Maglin, author and retired professor of writing, composition, and women’s literature outlines a writing class in which students focus on their mothers and grandmothers in her 1977 paper “Full of Memories”: Teaching Matrilineage. Maglin’s course was designed during the second-wave feminist movement, where “the new literature [of feminism] includes oral history, letters, diaries, songs, tales, quips, reminiscences because it recognizes the meaningfulness of women’s daily lives and validates the forms in which it has been transmitted” (891). She taught the importance and value of matrilineage, its effect on the
canon of literature, and its effect upon one’s identity. How information, data, is being collected is through primary sources outside mainstream sources. The “letters, diaries, songs,” etc., provide a better understanding of the family and the study of women culturally. Primary source gathering is not a new phenomenon, yet focusing on a marginalized group\textsuperscript{16} will not only increase the breadth of the canon of study in any field but begin to create equity.

Mirroring Paula Nicolson’s theory of “transmissions of family culture on multiple generations” (57), Maglin breaks down a few family dynamics and their effects on identity:

It is not only death that has separated granddaughters from grandmothers and daughters from mothers but a variety of personal and historical circumstances: the break-up of the extended family, the anger between the generations as daughters move up or out of the home (the daughter's anger at the seeming stasis of the mother; the mother's anger at the daughter's separation and difference), the intervention of materialism and the media between people, the desire or need of ethnic families to bury the past as a way to "integrate" into America. In addition to the ways that social, ethnic, and religious differences alter family ties, the particular psychodynamics within a family affect each grandmother/mother/daughter relationship somewhat differently (Maglin 889).

The difference between Maglin and Nicolson is that Maglin narrows the focus from the general transgenerational transmission of family culture to female transmission of family culture; even further, she looks at the dynamics between “grandmother/mother/daughter,” the matrilineal line. Maglin’s research for this paper expressed the importance of family storytelling and the collecting of first-hand accounts. The matrilineal sharing adds breadth to the general information of not only a family’s history but can be related to other family histories.
4.1. PHOTO ALBUM MODEL

The personal album has a long history dating back before the invention of photography; before photographs, the album was a location for collecting drawings, poetry, prose, watercolors, etc. It was an object used to facilitate conversation and sharing amongst those who were viewing the album (Di Bello, Langford, Dahlgren).

In Anna Dahlgren’s article *Dated Photographs*, she describes how the dating of the images in albums and other identifying notations indicated the ways in which albums are used to “construct narratives of identity, experience, and belonging” (181). Her research shows that some album owners were interested in collecting images in the album as status symbols. The personalized quality of the album symbolizes each album owner’s need for constructing identity through visual means, creating a place of memory. In other words, the photo album is a place-of-memory. It is a place where “private and professional practices of collecting identities” (Dahlgren 189) exists. The identities of the subjects are rewritten, a version of family history is preserved, and family members bond over shared memories in an album and bond in the sharing of family stories.

While it is important to emphasize the photo album as a place-of-memory, it is also a model for organization; a model I have used for the visual components of my thesis work. The album, as a place-of-memory, unites the family members and invites the viewer to evoke their familial memory. Martha Langford cites sociologist Richard Chalfen, who “defines the family album as a site of cross-generational exchange and cultural continuity” (Langford 2001; 4). An album is a place for people to gather in an intimate setting and have conversations. The album works very much a prompting for discussion, which begins the feedback loop onto an identity.
Artists like Jo Spence have used the photo album model in their work to elicit the connection of photographs to memory and family history. Jo Spence’s use of the family album created her places-of-memory in addition to being a therapeutic tool. “Spence showed how the family album is an operation on family memory, that what lies at the heart of the selection of idealizing moments for the telling of the family story and the very mechanism for forgetting” (Evans 113). Further explained by Griselda Pollock:

Since 1979, when British artist Jo Spence exhibited her photo-memory work Beyond the Family Album, private photographs and family mementoes have been transformed by feminist and other post-memory studies into a resource through which to trace the marks and lines hitherto unrecognized histories of power relations and ambivalent plays of desire and the unremembered across this ubiquitous and domesticated form of visual image culture (99).

With her position as a woman, Jo Spence has emphasized: “unrecognized histories of power relations” regarding gender. Hand-in-hand with matrilineal research, Spence has illuminated private female struggles such as breast cancer and other medical issues. These are issues that have affected Spence directly but also have, in various ways, affected all of our female ancestors.

* * *

Hannah, my third great-grandmother, died in 1919. Listed on her death certificate as the cause of death is “Cancer (prob. Sarcoma), fluid in the stomach, pneumonia.” I can only speculate about whether her condition was discussed in the family or not. Her daughter, Azuba D., had died six months earlier from influenza.

* * *
Spence’s use of the family album supports Evans’ notion that the album is a “mechanism for forgetting.” The traditional family album depicts happy moments, celebrations, and events that want to be remembered. As an artist, Spence’s work regarding breast cancer challenges the notions of the photo album, insisting that these unphotographed events be remembered to remind us that women often suffer in silence.


In Martha Langford’s detailed analysis of the use of autobiography regarding contemporary photography, she finds that

…a significant number of artists continue to generate work in which personal photographs are used to construct a public image. These autobiographical or pseudo-
autobiographical works present as photographic expressions of memory—visual reconstructions of interior states of being and becoming. The photographic album has become a notional vessel of such explorations. [...] an idea of album that survives the voyage from private to public work of art (Langford 2007; 23).

Continuing with Jo Spence as an example, her autobiographical works in the photo album model not only shed light upon the silent struggles of women but also express “visual reconstructions of interior states of being and becoming” (23). Spence’s female identity shines in her work; she bares all in her self-portraits, adding text to create a narrative that expresses the emotive memories through which she is working. Spence’s use of personal photographs reveals its inherent link with memory, emotion, and identity formation/transformation.

4.1.1. Be My Ancestor

While researching the family album, Patrizia Di Bello’s book *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England* became a primary reference. Originally the album existed in domestic spaces—before the invention of photography—such as the upper-class drawing room...
for women to draw in, copy writings, poetry, and share with her guests before dining. Often these albums were shared with guests, friends, and acquaintances who held a high position in society; it was requested of these individuals to participate in the content of the albums. Albums of the Victorian Era were symbols of status and gentility. Upon the invention of and consumerization of photography (approximately in the 1880s), albums filled with photographs still held the symbolism of class status, a status which slowly deteriorated once the photographic technology became more available to the middle and lower classes.

During the early 20th century, marketing strategies to increase the sales of photo technology began to target housewives with children, insisting upon the ease of photo capturing and the importance of photo albums in the role of mother. Photo albums became a permanent staple of the family unit spanning over one hundred years. Presently, camera access is nearly an extension of the self with the increasing upgrades of the cellphone. While family albums are still a large part of the family unit—especially families with small children—the ease and use of digital photography and sharing have created a no-longer tangible means for the family album.

Keeping all of this history in mind, I wanted to create a family album filled with old photos from my family that would appeal to modern-day people. The medium used to create this project is suited as a cellphone application. An app that simply houses a collection of photographs was not sufficient enough to engage and keep the attention of the modern app user; each photograph has a dynamic element where the face has been removed, creating a transparent opening in the image. The image then appears through the camera application on the cellphone—or other handheld devices—allowing the user to insert their face into my family photo. The user can then save and share the image via social media.
Photo albums are no longer valued as symbols of status and gentility; with the ability for anyone to capture images at any time and share them instantly, the desire for individuality and uniqueness is of higher value. This application provides anonymous old-photos with an opportunity for a new life.

When sharing this app with my grandmother, she spent all of her time on the app, trying to identify the faceless templates. Upon seeing the examples I had made with my face inserted into the images, Nana asked if I could share those with her so she can view them when she wanted. The addition of the manipulated photos into the family collection mirrors the work of digital media artist, Eva Weiner.

Eva Weiner wrote her experience using manipulated family photographs as prompts when interviewing her family members. In her paper *Photography and Mourning: Excavating Memories of My Great-Grandmother*, Weiner’s interviews provided a qualitative example of how her artistic work influenced her family history, herself, and relatives’ memories and imaginations. “These photographs offered [Weiner’s great-uncle] a tangible way to envision her with the rest of his family, something he has tried to imagine on his own” (Weiner 17). Her
great-uncle’s experience in seeing Weiner’s digitally manipulate images was described as having a profound effect on him. Photographs of long-dead loved ones can have a positive impact in a new context. Seeing Weiner’s great-grandmother photoshopped into a portrait of his own family, Weiner’s great-uncle, though provided a fully disclosed false photo, reported having a positive experience viewing and discussion regarding the image.

Weiner never claims that her work is an attempt to create a place-of-memory; however, the request that her doctored images become an addition to the family collection shows not only the emotional impact but the value of her artistic work as a place-of-memory. Sociologists Sahika Erkonan and Gillian Rose argue that a “family photograph is an image that has to look like a family photo but also has to be treated like one” (Erkonan 263; Rose 23). In Weiner’s case, the acceptance of her doctored photos into the family collection make them valid and valuable family photos despite their being more fiction than the truth.

4.2. ROLE AS FAMILY HISTORIAN: HOW DID I GET HERE?

When I was a kid, one of my patrilineal uncles sent me my family tree. It began with me, tracing backward to my mother and father, their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. This single sheet of paper felt so official and special to my ten-year-old self. The document outlined how I came to be and became part of who I am. I reunited with that document only recently while searching for old documents during this thesis research. Much of the matrilineal genealogy research I had been conducting stems from the information Nana had compiled in 2001-2003.

Nana’s genealogy research consisted primarily of hand-drawn family trees, written in pencil, and edited when new information came to light. She collected multiple three-ring binders of information: hard-copies of birth, death, marriage certificates; photocopied news clippings;
obituaries; and comprehensive pedigrees (lists of family members) tracing both forward and backward. In 2019, I gathered all of Nana’s documents she had compiled over a decade previous and began to read, digitize and transcribe the files, supplementing information from the many online websites. Much like the development of photographic images, this digitization process—which was done to preserve or at least digitally back-up the documents—was very much like I was *creating* something. I was extracting memories from others and attempting to unify the pieces in a meaningful way digitally.

![Fig. 4.5. Nana’s tree, c. 2001](image)

The exploration of genealogical research directly influences my thesis work. There were difficulties in pursuing the matrilineal line, i.e., different pre-marriage surnames, and the lack of detailed documentation. Matrilineal exploration grounds my role as a family historian. Other family members are also family historians; I, however, have a specialty. Historian Liz Gloyn argues that “traditional historical approaches to understanding and valuing archival practices
privilege state-driven modes of history-making, formal and institutionalized ways of thinking, and masculine and patriarchal forms of knowledge” (158). Understanding the matrilineal line constructs new knowledge and offers a different perspective on family history, creating a more holistic approach to genealogical research.

4.3. MATRILINEAL LINE

There is an apparent general lack of clarity surrounding women’s role in genealogical history and my family history. What were these women like? Who raised them if their mother died young? What were their interests? What was it like traveling pregnant on a ship from France to Canada? Where do I fit in with these women? Am I merely interested in preserving the family history because no one else in the family of my generation is interested? Or is there more I can add?

The historical obfuscation of female ancestors was not necessarily intentional. Still, the documentation of their lives and identities has been undeveloped due to the patrilineal preference taken by Western genealogy and the cultural exclusion of the majority of women in certain activities. Female ancestors do not have life-stories in my genealogical research; they have birth/death dates, marriage dates, and birth dates of their children. This information does not make a person; it does not capture the essence of a person. It merely captures the usefulness of a woman’s role as an object. The lack of richness and detailed accounts make the women one-dimensional accessories in men’s lives.

Exploring my matrilineal line using an art-based research approach cannot necessarily invent new facts or produce lost diaries, for example. But it does unify the past and present in an intrinsic, emotional manner, shifting the balance between truth and fiction. My artistic approach
to matrilineal work is an expression of myself in relation to my female ancestors. The feedback loop of my artwork and identity provides me a platform to work out my narrative. “When a person begins telling a narrative, they are using stories as ‘organizational tools’ in helping themselves claim their own identity” (Johnson 12). My artwork is the organizational tool used for me to claim my identity.

* * *

I was fortunate enough to find photographs of the women in my matrilineal line as far back as the 1860s. There are seven photographic portraits: myself, Aylah; my mother; grandmother; great-grandmother Annie; 2nd great-grandmother Azuba Delilah; 3rd great-grandmother Hannah; and 4th great-grandmother Azuba Noles. It was Azuba Noles’ grandmother, Jeanne Marguerite, who boarded a ship from France to Canada while pregnant with Susannah. Jeanne Marguerite died in childbirth on the vessel in 1752. Jeanne Marguerite’s death is recorded as being in France, yet the passenger list indicates she, not Susannah was aboard.

Born in Maine in 1812 and married in 1829, Azuba Noles and her husband William Sibley moved from Pittsfield, Maine, eighty-two miles north to Burlington, Maine. Five years after her marriage, she gave birth to her first child in Burlington. In 1883, Azuba signed over the deed of her father’s property to herself, twenty-eight years after her father’s death, and seven years before the death of her husband. In other words, at age seventy-one, Azuba was a property owner, which seems unusual as Azuba’s mother and father lived with their oldest son Daniel until their deaths. What I have been able to conclude is that Azuba and William were reasonably wealthy, as William was a retail liquor dealer. Together they owned at least two properties, one being the property on which they lived and the inherited property.
Fig. 4.6. Azuba Noles

Fig. 4.7. Hannah and James

Fig. 4.8. Portraits of my matrilineal line
There is a gap in childbirths for Azuba between 1846 and 1852, where several days travel would be possible if Azuba and William had decided to travel for portraits. Using transit maps from 1849, it is possible that traveling to Boston, assuming there were no photographers in Burlington, would be conceivable for people of moderate wealth (Disturnell). Based on the above information and the age Azuba appears, I have estimated the date to be between 1846 and 1852.

Azuba and William were part of the Victorian middle-class living on rural, undeveloped farmland in northeastern Maine. Their wealth was not vast, and what existed of it dissolved into the large future generations. The photographs of Azuba and William were likely taken well after their marriage yet considered to be a wedding portrait. There are no other photos from this time to suggest they did not have enough money to have a photographic hobby or repeated accessibility to photography. Hannah, Azuba’s daughter, has a formal portrait with her husband James (Fig 4.7). In the portraits, they appear advanced in age, and there are no other photographs of that time, roughly 1900. Hannah’s children would have been in their 20s at the beginning of the 20th century; there are a moderate number of photographs from this generation. My second great-grandmother, Azuba Delilah, Hannah’s daughter, is depicted in a handful of photographs. She is in her early 40s and eventually died in 1919 of the Spanish flu.

I believe the existence of Azuba and William’s portraits must have been valuable to them. To seek out this new medium and to have it preserved for more than 150 years illuminates the impressions photographs had on my family. My grandmother had captured and collected hundreds of photographs, my mother alternated between the disposable film camera and a bulky digital camera in the late 1990s and continues her passion for digitally shooting wildlife. My sister and I have been using cellphone cameras for at least a decade, and I abandoned the point-
and-shoot camera for a used Sony A100 in 2010, recently upgrading to the Sony A6000. As technology and accessibility increased in tandem, indeed, the women in my family maintained a connection to making photographs.

* * *

The quest for matrilineal knowledge is critical in the formation of the self in one form or another. I am not suggesting that everyone needs to take on genealogy as a hobby; I am suggesting that the loss of family connection and thus the loss of familial oration and sharing is partially to blame for an incomplete sense of self. *Where do I come from?* Is a question many Westerners ask themselves (Woodham). Di Bello points out that photographs are a manner in which to explore identity via acts of “self-reflection and self-contemplation”; this has become an “indispensable feature of a modern sensibility” (Di Bello 19).

When considering self-reflection and contemplation in association with the matrilineal line, photographs can create a connection between the emotional self and the photo’s subject, just as I have stated that I was able to form a bond with the images of my great-grandmothers. “A girl does not simply identify with her mother or want to be like her mother. Rather, mother and daughter maintain elements of their primary relationship, which means they will feel alike in fundamental ways” (Chodorow 110). Chodorow’s statement is addressing a more biological and fundamental approach to the mother/daughter relationship. I equate this to the mother/daughter relationship of interests where the underlying connection is a photograph, a photograph as the methodology for communication and memory.
4.3.1. Elizabeth M. Claffey

Fig. 4.9 Matrilinear II- 4, Elizabeth M. Claffey. https://elizabethclaffey.com/matrilinear-ii/1/4

American artist and professor Elizabeth M. Claffey focuses on the way “personal and familial narratives are shaped by interactions with both domestic and institutional structures and spaces” (Glasgow). Claffey uses photo processes as a form of documentation of her family history and a self-proclaimed ‘cross-generational conversation’ with her ancestors. Spectrally, Claffey’s work curates the details of women’s lives and presents them as genealogical documentation that lived intimately with her ancestors. The objects upon which she focuses are such intimate objects that they indubitably carry the original owner’s DNA.

Claffey’s x-ray aesthetic is reminiscent of traditional black-and-white photographs. While her technical process is more modern, her subject matter comes directly from her personal and
family history. *Matrilineal* and *Matrilineal II* are photo series inspired by a hand-me-down clothing tradition in her family. In *Matrilineal I*, Claffey creates photograms (exposing objects directly on light-sensitive paper) with clothing to express the embodiment of oppression felt by generations of women. This clothing used is what Claffey describes as items of clothing that would have been kept close to the body for comfort or protection (Claffey) such as undergarments and infant clothing.

In *Matrilineal II* (Fig. 4.8), Claffey makes photograms of tissues found in the pockets of women spanning across generations. The tissues form ethereal, apparition-like portraits of the women to whom they once belonged. Claffey says in an interview: “This series, in shape and form, is designed to challenge the way that one defines knowledge, which has ultimately been shaped by patriarchy. How knowledge is defined and who is allowed to acquire it have always been an exercise of power by those in control, so the theories, wisdom, and experiences of “others” are often unacknowledged as being of consequence or having value within the public realm” (Glasgow).

Without saying so directly, Elizabeth Claffey’s works are places-of-memory. Places she can revisit to recall her research into her family’s history. The outcomes reside in her artistic practice and family perceptions. Claffey has “learned that most often people know their ancestors through stories of birth, death, illness, and recovery. These stories of the body can reveal intimacies of one’s physical fears and expectations and also act as critical information when navigating personal health and identity [. . .] These stories are personal evolutions and can act as a foundation for understanding and self-acceptance” (Glasgow). In analyzing Claffey’s words from a 2017 interview, she agrees with the notion that family history does indeed affect identity formation. Additionally, the apex of her work examines the connection between the objects and
the body, insinuating the importance of generational memory. The patterns of behavior and health in family lines can significantly impact the identity and perspective of future generations.

Claffey’s concepts with kindred manifestation place us in a similar creative category. The autoethnographic/autobiographic approach to Claffey’s work shows the importance of researching family history and its influence on the artist’s identity. Her approach to matrilineal work utilizes the stories of her family as well as some of the disposable artifacts. Claffey’s alternative road to personal identity mirrors my own and unifies our conceptual research practices. The coincidental titling of our two projects as Matrilinear and Matrilineal solidifies the yearning for a deepened investigation of the feminine, female ancestors and the necessity for our identities to be complete.

4.4. *FRACTURED WEDDING CYANOTYPES*

At this juncture in my research, where I was reflecting on my past work and making new work intentionally influenced by family photographs, I created an art installation using family wedding photos. While “[w]edding portraits of working-class couples began to emerge in the 1870s and became common by the 1890s”, unfortunately, the lower classes, such as farmers, were less likely to possess their wedding portraits (Hudgins 567). Presently it is difficult to imagine a couple getting married and not having photographic evidence. Many members of my family have separate albums devoted to only wedding photos. I was able to access my wedding photos, my mother’s, my Nana’s, and her mother’s. My great-grandmother only had one wedding photograph where myself, my mother, and grandmother have dozens of wedding photos.
Immediately I noticed a pattern in these four wedding photographs: none of the women were wearing elaborate wedding gowns; only two women were wearing a dress even remotely white; they were all small weddings, three of which conducted in a courthouse. The knowledge gained about these women was achieved only by collecting and analyzing the photographs. Additionally, we all had only been married once, and all women except for me were widowed. As transgenerational patterns emerge and information regarding each woman’s identity surfaces, inevitably, I can see the similarities in my matrilineal line regarding personality, priorities, and even the type of man to which we are attracted. Nicolson wrote of this cyclical pattern across generations: “understanding marriage led to following how gender roles and women’s
oppression were played out in the domestic context…women’s oppression in the family might be transmitted across generations” (Nicolson, 60).

Wanting to cling tightly to my matrilineal line, I found that the men in the images distracted from that. I do not believe the omission if the men are required, but I think having them included shows my bilineal and bilateral descent, not my matrilineal line. Bilineal and bilateral descent lines are different from one another. Bilineal decent refers to an individual who is both a member of their mother and father’s descent (O’Neil). Bilateral descent refers to socially recognizing every biological ancestor as a relative (O’Neil).

The wedding photos still appearing as marriage documentation rendered in cyanotype, I altered the digital images. Running each image through a photo application called Fragment, the photos were digitally cut and randomized, creating a kaleidoscopic picture. The couple was virtually unrecognizable, removing any suggestion that the portraits were genealogical documentation. Fragmenting the photos also removed any confusion regarding the family line, as it was eradicated. The shifting of balance, too, and from truth and fiction is part of what sparks

Fig 4.11. Fractured Wedding installation, 2019
curiosity in the images. The final product consisted of eight kaleidoscopic wedding portraits on silk, as seen in Figure 4.11 and Figure 4.12.

Wedding photos “marked the memory of the couple’s first day as a new family” and “expressed their feelings of optimism” (Hudgins 568). Adding my artistic touch expressed my hope and feelings of optimism faced with generations of widows. Using these ‘pictoral markers for the absent’ inspired the installation in my mother’s childhood bedroom. Her room was at one-point Nana’s sewing room. The very place where I learned to sew. This room is a place-of-memory for me about both women. Installing work in Nana’s house solidifies the location and the artwork as places-of-memory.

*   *   *

During the summer of 2020, I was able to visit Nana briefly. I had not been able to visit her as she is considered high-risk regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Nana had sent me a text message which read, “Hi Aylah! You have my photo albums. I want to see them again. Think you can bring them up? Nana.” I was so excited to hear from her and planned to visit the
following weekend. I brought the photos she requested, yet they were no longer in their original albums. I had digitized each image and placed them in plastic, archival sleeves, inside archival binders. When I showed her, she was impressed that I went to such great lengths to preserve them.

As Nana was looking through the albums, I went up-stairs to my mother’s childhood bedroom to retrieve the *Fractured Wedding* series for a forthcoming exhibit. I found them not displayed as I left them, but neatly folded on a shelf. I gathered them and brought them downstairs. My grandmother looked at me seriously and asked: “What are you planning to do with those photos of my mother?” I told her about the upcoming art show and reassured her that I would return them if she wanted. She agreed, so long as I brought them back.

*   *   *

The *Fractured Wedding* series existed in my grandmother’s house. She was living with these items and considered them her own. The memory of her parents was kept alive in these silk cyanotype prints. “[P]hotographs have always been valued for their *dimension résurrectionelle*¹⁹, or ability to keep the memory of the departed ones alive,” and they serve as “pictorial ‘markers’ for the absent person” (Hudgins 573).
Fractured Portraits is a cyanotype series on paper of my matrilineal line. Obscured slightly, the portraits are still recognizable as the individual women. The prints are fractured visually, as seen through a kaleidoscope, while also representing the fractured narrative of their lives. The full story of each woman is obscured by the lack of information preserved over time.
The only connection I retain to these women is a familial resemblance and a mutual family history. The women who came before me aid in the framing of my narrative.

Marianne Hirsch discusses how family photographs “frame us” as individuals and as family units.

Through this familial look, I define a boundary between inside and outside, claiming these women as a part of the story through which I construct myself. This inclusion is an act of adoption and an act of recognition. It is fundamentally an interpretive and narrative gesture, a fabrication out of available pieces that acknowledges the fragmentary nature of the autobiographical act and its ambiguous relation to reference. Photographs are fragments of stories, never storied in themselves (Hirsch 83).

Hirsch’s observation of her family photos affects her identity as she grapples with the internal and the external. Describing this process as an “interpretive gesture” and a “fabrication” illuminates the issues of truth and fiction within her family photographs, within her own identity. While I agree that “photographs are fragments of stories” because without context and photographs existing as singular objects are fragments, I disagree with the notion that photographs are “never storied in themselves.” Photographs are the physical point of departure into the abstraction of memory. They may not always be associated with stories, but they certainly can be; photographs can be places-of-memory; therefore, they must have the capacity for being “storied in themselves.”
Regardless, Hirsch’s affinity for her family photographs is reflected in her seeking the “familial look”; seeing the similarities in the visual genetics creates a sense of connection, which in turn invigorates the feedback loop. Similarly, I “claim these women as part of the story through which I construct myself.” Not only are they truthfully depictions of women with whom I share minute amounts of DNA, but they are women who likely shared similar feelings of oppression, discrimination, and silence. The possibilities of how their lives were lived grant an aperture for me to insert my assumptions, my fictions.

Fig. 4.15. Fractured Portraits II: Annie, 2020

The use of family photographs in the framing of personal narrative expands and contracts generations of social, political, and personal issues. Di Bello writes:

[S]ocial history with feminist and psychoanalytic understandings of the workings of gender as representation, [are used] to visually reconstruct and imaginatively change […]

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family history. This is not to arrive at a sanitized, happy version, or to achieve a unitary,
definite self-image, but to expose, resist and attempt to counteract the social, political and
unconscious process through which women are constructed in a patriarchal and capitalist
society (Di Bello 22).

Di Bello’s approach to understanding photographs emphasizing the truth of family history in an
attempt to “resist and attempt to counteract the social, political and unconscious process.” The
ability to use one’s family history to reframe gender in Western culture challenges the societal
feedback loop to disrupt patrilineal ideologies. Disruption of patrilineal ideologies occurs
through working with the matrilineal line. Emphasizing the lives and the unseen work of these
women ensures that they, too, do not get lost in the Mobius strip of history.
4.6 MATRILINEAL CUBES: ACCIDENTAL NEGATIVES

“Negatives, as “memories of memories” or long-term memories to the positives which have split apart or disappeared, were for a long time seen as just as they were black-holes” (Peracia 4). Film negatives are necessary for creating an analog positive, the photographic print. Typically, after the printing of photographs, the film negatives were improperly cared for, discarded, or lost. For the modern consumer of photographs, negatives were extra “stuff.” dark and unobservable.

I had been primarily working with cyanotype, and I needed negatives in doing so. However, the more I experimented with the cyanotype, the more attracted I grew to the negatives themselves. In an attempt to emphasize the negatives and allowing a hands-on component for the viewer, I created Matrilineal Cubes. To underscore the special-ness of the photos and of the film itself, I had cast the film portraits in resin cubes, as seen in Figure 4.17. The cubes depict five of the seven women in my matrilineal line. The cubes were made in various amounts and sizes so that handling and organizing by the viewer are possible. Upon observing many people interact with the cubes, I was pleasantly surprised to see the variety of responses: some people gently picked up one or two and examined them; some people compulsively sorted or stacked them by each woman’s face.

Regardless of physical reaction, the viewers wanted to talk about the cubes, ask about the identity of the women, the medium choice, etc. The conversational component was unexpected yet happily received. The engagement with the physical objects sparked the viewers’ memories and stories. The level of exposure and engagement my deceased great-grandmothers received is unprecedented in the genealogical sense. These women were not celebrities, yet they had been preserved in a unique, hand-made fashion which evoked curiosity.
Fig. 4.18. Matrilineal Cubes. 2019.
Fig. 4.19. *Matrilineal Cubes* detail. Photo by Jim Winters

Fig. 4.20. *Matrilineal Cubes* detail. Photo by Jim Winters
4.7 FAMILY MEMORY

To create an interactive art piece and fit with the themes of memory and family photographs, I created *Family Memory*, a memory card game (Fig 4.22). The memory card game is something that has existed in my childhood and come back to me through my son’s childhood. A common factor of life in my family is the presence of children. *The Milton Bradley Original Memory Matching Game* was something played among siblings and cousins at my grandparents’ house. In the 1980s, when I played, the images were simple illustrations of fruit, vegetables, and animals. The game is played with different images face-down. Each player takes turns flipping two cards, trying to get a matching pair. Over time, the game has been re-marketed to fit with every conceivable cartoon character and pop-culture icon. My son owns two versions, one of Dr. Seuss's characters and one of Curious George's characters. The memory game is made for ages four and up and can be played by every family member. This game intended to allow for the touch-ability of art in the gallery, a direction I would like to explore in my future work.

Fig. 4.21. *Family Memory* video still, 2020
The game’s act of repetitive movement and repetition of imagery is designed to exercise memory and spatial skills. Matching the faces of my female relatives was an exercise in illuminating women in my ancestral history, much like the *Matrilineal Cubes*. The emphasis on making the unseen seen is the entry point for the viewer to consider their matrilineality. The work also provides me an opportunity to examine my matrilineality in relation to others. Not only am I able to have memories with the portraits of these women, but I create memories with those who engage with the piece.

### 4.8. MATRILINEAL INSTALLATION

*Matrilineal Cubes* had a profound effect on the viewers; the translucent quality of the photographs was compelling. I hoped to maintain the viewer’s level of interest in the continuation of my matrilineal project. The small nature of the portraits cast in resin suited the hand-held aspect of the cube piece. I found the film itself was compelling and wanted to maintain the use of the film and adjust the scale. Printing the portraits at a larger-than-life-size created an imposing effect as opposed to the intimacy of the cubes. The inadvertent dismissal of
my matrilineal line was a feature of my family’s genealogy I wanted to remedy. I wanted this line to be seen. The *Matrilineal* installation (Fig. 4.25) is a piece large enough not to be overlooked or dismissed visually in a gallery setting. Each portrait measures 24” x 36”.

Hung in succession, six inches apart, layered in front of a window, they interacted with each other and the changing light from the sun’s ecliptic. The photo installation hangs together, organized as a spineless photo album, arranging the photographs via the preference of the artist. Thus, reminding us of the influence of identity on my artistic practice and my creative practice on my identity. Upon reflection, I decided that the order of the portraits ought to be less truth and more fiction. Instead of succession, I ordered the portraits based on the amount of information I retained for each woman. Beginning with myself, then my mother, my grandmother, Annie, Azuba Noles, Azuba Delilah, and finally, Hannah.
In keeping with the organizational model of the photo album, the portraits hang in a way that would evoke curiosity, hopefully leading to a conversation about matrilineality. As my work was becoming less genealogical and more about creating a place-of-memory, there still existed the struggle of balancing between exhibiting a document vs. exhibiting a memento. I am restoring the line between truth and fiction.

Fig. 4.25. *Matrilineal* installation detail. Photo by Jim Winters

Fig. 4.26. *Matrilineal* installation video still
Fig. 4.27. Matrilineal installation, video still

Fig. 4.28. Matrilineal installation, video still

Fig. 4.29. Matrilineal installation, video still
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

By using the actual photographs in my collection in tandem with my art practice, I opened the photos up to analysis. I have illuminated and reframed family history and definitions of self, using photographs of my matrilineal line and my artistic practice as a methodology for exploring the abstract. This intricate statement was achieved through an equally complex analysis of conceptual theories, sewn together with the thread of memory. Stemming from my genealogical research, I have begun to “understand the background to some of the pressures on family life, we expose the material that trickles into our sense of identity” (Nicolson 86). My research not only illuminated previously unknown notions of my family history but also illustrated the feedback loop of information, which has aided in the fluidity of my identity.

My role as a family historian and the last woman in my matrilineal line, and the need to preserve the line, reincorporates the information into my family memory. The creation of places-of-memory is the “passage[s] from memory to history.” This process allows me to redefine my identity by revitalizing my history. (Nora 15). In this way, all those in my family who experience this piece become historians, sharing in the role. The viewer is invited to become a historian, to reflect upon their family history, their matrilineal lines.

Langford says about memoriography, “As a memoriographer I must include my being with the image, the factors of co-presence that have mattered to me, and therefore shaped what I have retained as an image. The work before me is the materialization of a thought that is now partially mine” (Langford 2007; 289). The idea here is that the viewer is allowed to become a partial owner of my work by permitting the transmission of the experience to enter into their feedback
loop. Not everyone will experience the work in this way, but I hope that the viewer will access their memories of their family.

By viewing the Matrilineal pieces, which in their most simple explanation are redefinitions of the photo album, the viewer can consider the ideals of family history and definitions of self. In discussing their own family identity, the viewer opens the “doors of social memory” (Langford 2001; 36). They become part of the social memory at that moment; “[a]lbum-works, like albums, prompt us to tell life-stories. The reflexiveness of album-works also prompts stories about albums, which are essentially stories about memory rising” (Langford 2007; 23). Stemming from that moment comes conversation. Discussion of the work, analysis of family history, sharing personal stories and family stories outside of the family unite us.

I plan to continue pursuing this line of conceptual work in keeping with family photographs. There is a multitude of patterns emerging from my family archive, which have the potential for exciting art that will spark conversation in and outside of the family. The places-of-memory which will come from my future work are examples of rewritten family histories “from the perspectives of [a] new epistemological era. Daughters at each position tell a similar family story because people who share common ways of knowing construe the world similarly” (Belenky 156, citing Kegan). I have, in effect, rewritten my family history by plumbing the family archives for source material.

Success in my work comes when I can speak with the viewer of my work. While it is more satisfying to meet those who “share common ways of knowing and construe the world similarly,” meeting and discussing my work with people who construe the world differently is where change can occur. Introducing the idea of how family history can repeat itself if we are unaware of the patterns can jump-start the feedback loop of change. Places-of-memory within a
family system can bring forth the awareness required for change, while also hanging onto essential family memories.
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BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Aylah Ireland (b. 1987, Maine, United States) is a conceptual artist, photographer, and curator. She obtained a BA in Art from the University of Maine at Augusta (UMA) in 2017. Aylah was awarded the 2020-2021 Dick Higgins Fellowship to aid in her Ph.D. research. She has received several Intermedia grants from the University of Maine and curated the UMA Alumni Art Exhibition in 2019 at the Harlow Gallery in Hallowell, Maine. Aylah has exhibited in solo shows, and group art shows throughout central Maine, as well as being a guest speaker and artist mentor at UMA. She is a candidate for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Intermedia from the University of Maine in August 2020.

ENDNOTES

1. *Mise en scene*, a theatre term meaning the arrangement of scenery and stage properties in a play. In photography and theatre, the term references everything in the frame that carries meaning.

2. Cyanotype was invented for making blueprint copies. For more information, see Christina Z. Anderson’s *Cyanotype: The Blueprint in Contemporary Practice*. CRC Press, 2019.

3. Sirchie.com is a company claiming to be a “Global Leader in Crime Scene Investigation” and “Forensic Science.” Sirche allows public access to all of their products and training online.

4. A swag bag refers to a gift bag, or a parting gift bag filled with free gifts or products, and is primarily used as a promotional item.

5. Cranes are a symbol in some Asian cultures, which means ‘good.’ There is a Japanese myth that says if a person folds 1000 paper cranes, then they will be granted one wish by the gods. For more information, read Kara, Mehmet, and Ersin Teres. "The Crane as a Symbol of Fidelity in Turkish and Japanese Cultures." *Milli Folklor* 24.95 (2012).

6. For privacy reasons, I will not be naming living relatives. Personal interview. 19 December 2018.

7. For privacy reasons, I will not be naming living relatives. Text message to the author. 19 December 2018.

8. For privacy reasons, I will not be naming living relatives. Text message to the author. 19 December 2018.

9. The suet orbs were made from birdseed and lard, formed in spherical molds. I was concerned about the animals getting injured by the yarn in the trees; thus, I hung the suet away from the branches with the yarn panels. I also surveilled the tree and removed all of the elements I added at the completion of the project.

10. Plumbing aging relatives for information is viewed as ageist in that the aging community exists to have things taken from them without resistance. My grandmother was always happy to share her information, yet it was important to me that we maintain conversational equity.

11. For privacy reasons, I will not be naming living relatives. Personal interview. 26 October 2019.

12. French term translates into “environments of memory.”

13. Definition of *memoriographer* is from an essay by Alon Confino discussing the work of Nora and Le Goff.

14. The oldest photograph found was likely a daguerreotype. The process of making such an image would not require the use of a negative. Instead, the image would be exposed directly onto a copper plate coated thinly with silver. Once exposed, the copper plate was developed by heating mercury. The fumes would adhere to the silver creating
the image. The copper plate would then be placed in a salt bath or solution of sodium thiosulfate to fix the image. See [https://www.loc.gov/collections/daguerreotypes/articles-and-essays/the-daguerreotype-medium/](https://www.loc.gov/collections/daguerreotypes/articles-and-essays/the-daguerreotype-medium/) for more information.

15 Miriam Schapiro (1923–2015) and Judy Chicago (1939-) taught at the CalArts Feminist Art Program in Los Angeles in the 1970s. They are both considered pioneers in feminist art. Schapiro is best known for her colorful, geometric quilts and abstract paintings. Chicago is best known for *The Dinner Party*, which was considered vulgar by some members of the community in which it was exhibited, that it was debated in Congress in the 1990s. A clip of that can be seen here: [https://www.c-span.org/video/?4603955/user-clip-congressman-discussing-dinner-party](https://www.c-span.org/video/?4603955/user-clip-congressman-discussing-dinner-party)

16 In my case, white women from Maine, USA, but in other cases, women of color, men of color, indigenous people, LGBTQ, and arguably the most impoverished populations.

17 I primarily use Ancestry.com. I have found that using a single source is not entirely reliable. The information is being entered by humans who tend to make wishful errors when linking interesting ancestors to their trees. I cross-reference the information with the documents my grandmother had as well as using geni.com, genealogy.com, familysearch.org, archives.gov, and Maine vital records sites. Often each site has something a little different or has an additional document that helps if I have hit a brick wall.

18 A photogram is an image made by placing objects, not film, between a light-sensitive substrate and UV light.

19 A French term which directly translates to ‘resurrection dimension.’ A term cited in Nicole Hudgins’ paper from Claire Chevalier, "A propos d'une photo de famille" in Ethnogrophie, t. 92, no. 120 (1996), 85. I was not able to access the Chevalier article to explain further.

20 Recommended one or more players. I think it is more fun with a friend.

21 I am declaring that I am the last woman in my DIRECT matrilineal line because I have no daughters and plan to have no more children. I do, however, have a sister who may have a daughter in the future, as of the publication of the document. my sister does not have a daughter. Aside from this information, the matrilineage will continue through my son and my sister’s son, but not matrilineal descent.