

STÉPHANE LAUZON... AS HIMSELF

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By

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“Since photography and family had been vividly allied in my own experience, their association seemed obvious.”

Julia Hirsch, *Family Photographs: Content, Meaning, and Effect.*

1. Introduction:

Stéphane Lauzon... as himself explores the roles that we play as we pose for the family camera. The meanings of family photographs (such as those from photo albums) are socially constructed to instruct their reading. With this project I endeavour a different reading of family photography by questioning and reinterpreting the conventions of the genre.

Familial history and belonging are fostered by photography, telling us who, what, and where we come from. This project was made possible by a shift in my art practice over the course of the last two and a half years. During this period my artwork evolved from fairly straightforward photography to photo-based performance. The roles I have played with my extended family have also changed, along with my working method. At first, my family was the subject of the work but later became its co-author.

2. Background:

2.1 The early years:

My earliest memories of extended family gatherings include people taking photographs of my cousins, my brother, and me. When I was a child, my father was the *family portraitist*¹ for the nuclear and extended family; he was the person who had the responsibility to take photos at family functions. As my cousins and I grew up the need to take photographs of us diminished since our parents no longer felt it necessary to preserve our childhood. Eventually, I inherited not only the family camera, but also the role of family portraitist. During high school and into university my role as family photographer diminished while I pursued more “artistic” goals. Towards the end of my BAV² my practice shifted back to photography and family. My practice involved taking photographs of my father’s side of my extended family in Ottawa, using a half-frame camera³ to create panoramas that spanned multiple frames.



Figure 1: Half-frame panorama.

I have used a half-frame camera to document various family gatherings. Because the camera is small and inconspicuous, it allows for a candid and honest portrayal of the participants. These half-frame panoramas are composed of multiple images that imply a passage of time and an unfolding of familial history. Rather than documenting the dramas of the event, I

favour the images gained from the banalities and rituals of these occasions, as they quietly suggest the underlying story.⁴

At this point in my career I saw myself as a documentary photographer looking for a sense of self through the images of my extended family; I felt that by closer inspection of these images I could uncover the hidden nature of my family and myself.⁵ “Lineage reveals an identity stronger, more interesting than legal status — more reassuring as well, for the thought of origins soothes us,”⁶ writes Barthes about our relationship to photographs of family members. By looking at old photographs of members of our extended family, living and dead, we feel part of a continuous chain that lies behind us. This sense of belonging reassures us of who we are.

2.2 Grad school:

When I moved to Saskatoon to do my MFA, I continued this practice of documenting my extended family but shifted it to my mother’s side. The only significant change at the start of my graduate work was the abandonment of the half-frame camera in favour of a full frame 35mm. I realized that the half-frame panoramas had become a crutch, making my practice too formulaic. In collecting images of my mother’s family I was trying to create an alternate family album that would somehow function outside the traditional model. I was following most of the traditional family album’s canons, such as the absence of linear, chronological, or biographic structure.⁷ I only made two shifts from the canon. The first was in scale and presentation, though this change proved to be small because the walls of the gallery read as giant album pages. The second shift was in composition. In opposition to the ritualized photographs of the family album, the photographs on the gallery wall

showed family members in unguarded poses. The photographs were placed in loose



Figure 2: General view of wall and two sample photographs.

groupings that followed my own internal rationale, such as personal history, that was not immediately discernible to an outside viewer. At times the groupings were based on formal considerations. At other times they were based on the content of the images and my personal history with the subjects. The viewer was allowed to become the narrator, in absence of an actual one, to facilitate the reading of the images by associating the images with his or her own experiences.

2.3 *The crisis:*

After a year of working on this project I became disillusioned with my method and with photography in general. The family photographs were ultimately unfulfilling. Julia Hirsch describes family photography as provocative; she writes, “[family photography] invites our curiosity about personalities and relationships but cannot fully satisfy it.”⁸ The frustration from my unsatisfied curiosity was compounded by my loss of satisfaction with the process, both conceptual and technical. To paraphrase Jean-Claude Chamboredon, being both a servant of an apparatus and transcriber of the external world, I could only

doubt my creative freedom and the uniqueness of my creations.⁹ Like any aesthete without the illusion of aesthetic innovation, I had lost my interest in photography and the inevitable failure of this project left me empty. Consequently, I could only engage with photography emotionally and not intellectually.

Later I realized that it was not the family relationships I wanted to document but my own sense of belonging. I understood that I was only continuing a practiced strategy of removing myself from family reunions by using my camera as a shield. It wasn't until a visiting artist (Ed Pien) pointed this out that I started to question the habit. It was difficult to come to terms with the realization that my artistic practice of hiding behind the camera was the antithesis of my goal of documenting and exploring how I belong within the family.

2.4 Resolution:

To reinvigorate my practice I tried to redefine my relationship to art-making by pursuing, without critical filtration, any idea that floated into my head. Despite my wish to explore other media, photography inevitably crept into my process. It seemed that in exploring alternatives to photography I nevertheless kept returning to the same medium I was questioning.

A Day with Granny and the *Wedding Crashing* series were the most valuable of these projects. Both were collaborations where someone else played the role of "photographer" while I played the role of "subject" in front of the camera. *A Day with Granny* consists of two grids of twenty photographs that my grandmother and I took of each other during a day we had spent together. The *Wedding Crashing* series consists of

“artefacts” such as wine bottles and candles, and photographs taken from various wedding



Figure 3: Images from the *A Day with Granny*.

receptions. My friend and I would trespass on wedding receptions and mingle with the guests. Throughout the reception my partner would take snapshots of me as I played the role of a welcome wedding guest. These were the first works I had done in some time that I



Figure 4: Images from the *Wedding Crashing*.

didn't detest; consequently, I felt very hesitant to rework them for fear of losing my enthusiasm. These pieces liberated me from the *technical culture*¹⁰ of the medium in which I had taken refuge, and gave me the freedom to interact with people without using the camera as a shield.

As an artist, the elements of chance and risk associated with having someone else take the photographs were quite important in renewing my relationship with photography. At first, surrendering the camera was somewhat akin to giving up a gun only to have it turned against you.¹¹ Although not as traumatic, getting *shot* by a camera is still a very real experience requiring diligence.¹² One's identity is closely tied to our image; we do not, and should not, relinquish images of ourselves lightly. In approaching these collaborations, I quickly learned the importance of rules, both explicit and implicit. I became aware of how these rules directed the expectations of my collaborating photographers and affected how they acted out their role. To quote conceptual artist Sol LeWitt, "...my art is not about making choices. It's in making an initial choice of, say, a system, and letting the system do the work."¹³ LeWitt saw his function as that of creating a system that then did the work; he only intervened if an impasse or contradiction appeared. Although none of my projects came to an impasse I often saw a need to fine-tune explanations and directives to facilitate the progress of the projects' systems. Because of the collaborative nature of these projects it was necessary to have more in-depth exchanges with my collaborators. In this work, the photographs served as documents to present a structure (system) that is experiential and a non-object. Both *Wedding Crashing* and *A Day with Granny* insert themselves into pre-existing systems where photography is native to the context.¹⁴

Another piece that was crucial to my developing studio practice was *The Wallet*, completed for the SPASM II public art festival in Saskatoon in May/June 2004. Radically different from other work I had produced, this piece consisted of a series of wallets I would "lose" over the duration of the festival at a rate of one a day. The wallets were complete with ID cards, money, photos, business cards, and other wallet detritus — all the information necessary for *finders* to return them to their rightful owner: "Casey Richards,"

a person I created for the project. The audience was limited to those who found the wallets and who were then faced with the moral dilemma of returning or keeping them. I was intrigued by the ability of this piece, situated between intervention and performance, to insert itself into the lives of random people across the city. Again it was the interaction and the element of serendipity that I found to be of value in the piece. As with *A Day with Granny* and *The Wedding Crashing* series the success of *The Wallet* was in the elaboration and completion of a system. Where *The Wallet* diverges from the other two projects is in

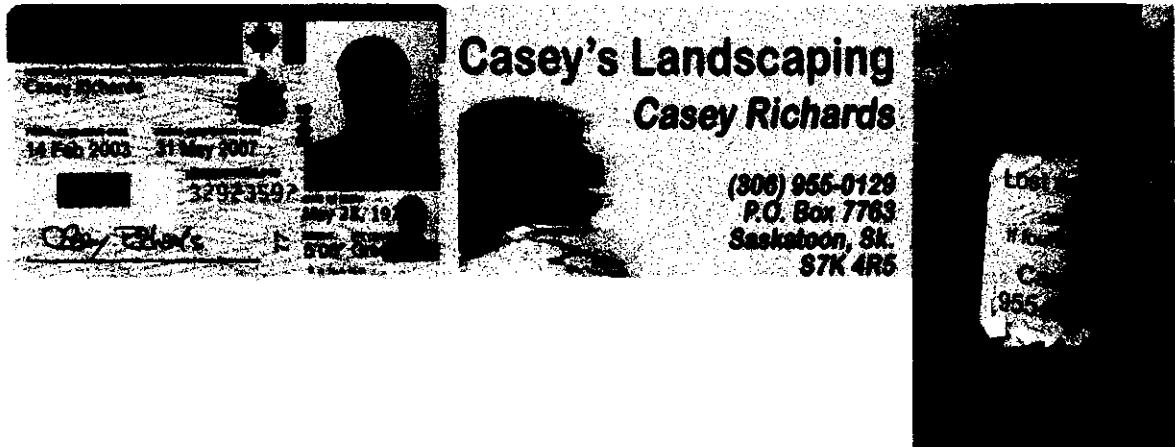


Figure 5: *The Wallet*, driver's licence, business card and poster.

its lack of documentation. Despite the secondary evidence such as the lost wallet signs posted around the Saskatoon core area, the piece was essentially invisible to all but the *finders*. The absence of direct documentation of the activity proved to be problematic for outside viewers who were left to guess at the process and the content of the piece. This project evidenced the need for an *object* to direct the viewer in the reading of the work.

3. Stéphane Lauzon... as himself

Stéphane Lauzon... as himself, my thesis exhibition work, is a series of portraits of me taken by members of my extended family. The family members were instructed to dress me according to “how [they] saw me” and to photograph me in a location that reinforced their idea. I let them choose the type of film and had them use their own cameras. Accompanying the photographs are labels containing information on the photographers and the shoots. On a different wall are quotes I have selected from transcripts of conversations recorded with the photographers. The conversations revolved around their concepts for the photographs, formal issues of the images, their experiences with the project, our personal histories and relationships, their choices for the final image, their experience of shooting me, and their rationales for the construction of their image. The quotes were selected to add nuances and open up the interpretation of the photographs. By having the quotes on a separate wall the gallery viewer is encouraged to play a game of connect-the-dots to associate quotes with specific images. With many of the quotations possibly belonging to multiple photographs, the game of association becomes complex for the viewer. The possibility of misattributing quotes opens up the reading (or misreading) of the images.

In approaching this project I found that in order to propel the work, it was of utmost importance to establish a system by setting rules. Conceptual artist Douglas Huebler uses simple rules to direct his collaborators. For example, in *Variable Piece #7, Limoges, France, December 1992* Huebler asked five-year-old Louise Paul to find lookalikes for her father and the artist in the neighbourhood market. Huebler proceeded to photograph Louise Paul with both sets of lookalikes. The images are displayed in the company of a text (consisting of three paragraphs) explaining the process and the photographic

documentation of the process. In *Stéphane Lauzon... as himself* I tried to achieve a similar clarity and simplicity within the rules of the project. Here are the rules given to the photographers:

1. Photograph me as you see me.
2. Use any of my clothing or property, or bring anything you want, to dress me as you see me.
3. Use a location that reflects your view of me.
4. Use your own camera. If you don't have one, use one of mine.
5. Select one photograph to enlarge.
6. Have a short, recorded conversation with me about your experience.

Ideally, the rules are structured to direct the photographers while allowing them maximum freedom in constructing their portraits of me. The photographers were given sufficient time to think over the rules (usually a week or more) before the shoot. Some family members initially struggled with the project and the openness of the rules. I allowed for flexibility when explaining the rules, expanding the instructions to accommodate individual photographers. My family's participation was motivated by a desire to help me in my project; consequently, they looked to me for guidance, and were anxious that they might disappoint me. To moderate my influence and to encourage them in their work, I tried to seem enthusiastic about whatever idea they proposed. They played the role of photographer from start to end: they selected the scenario, they chose and prepared the costume, they directed throughout the shoot, and they selected the final *gallery* image. Once the process was underway I supported them in their decisions and only offered occasional suggestions, such as encouraging them to take a large number of photographs and to vary the poses. Here my function was to facilitate the session and to make sure that they had sufficient images for them to choose from later. I facilitated the completion of the system by guiding the photographers through the process while allowing them freedom to explore their ideas.¹⁵

3.1 The text:

In *Stéphane Lauzon... as himself* I use text in two ways: the gallery labels and the text panel quotations. In both, I play against conventions to reveal the process and the photographer's voice. While formally similar to gallery labels, the labels that accompany each of my images use unconventional categories. Instead of title, date, and medium, the labels contain the type of camera used, the location photographed and the clothing and accessories I was directed to wear.¹⁶ This information is reminiscent of technical camera clubs and technical photography magazines; the level of detailed information that only an ardent amateur photographer (such as technical camera club member) could want to know. The information on the labels is ultimately a satire of the technical culture. *Techies* would not be impressed by the point-and-shoot cameras used, or by the commonplace locations chosen for the photographs. The reference to technical photography acts as a foil to a lack of technical proficiency demonstrated in many of the photographs. This is not to mock the family photographers but to suggest that technical virtuosity is not necessary to producing art in the context of this project. The technical failings of the photographs make them curiosities within the gallery, but because they are coded as art, by their size and the context of the project, they belong there.

The text panels are more than the typically brief annotations that often accompany family photographs.¹⁷ In contrast to Huebler's text that explains the process, the quotes in my exhibition reference the *familial gaze*.¹⁸ Author and scholar Marianne Hirsch defines the familial gaze as the culturally idealized view of the family. The quotations on the panels describe the relationships of the various members of my family with me, their experiences within the project, their motivations for choosing an image, and/or their

particular social backgrounds. The panels have three different sizes. The larger panels are meant to be more declarative statements and less personal; as the panels become smaller the quotes become more intimate and personal. The wide range of quotations addresses issues of subjectivity and the diversity of approaches to the exercise in creating a representative portrait of me. The specificity of the quotes further complicates their reading. Quotations like "This is Stéphane to me. He likes to dress casual and he still looks hip" and "It's kind of eye of the beholder type shit" are quite general and can apply to most of the images. Other quotes like "Going to work is an uphill battle, coming home from work is downhill all the way" and "That sock is an inside joke between you and I" are easily attributable and, as such, speak specifically and with more authority to the images' meanings.

3.2 Art making:

While taking snapshots is routine for my family, with this project it was the ultimate use of the photographs in an art gallery setting that weighed on their minds. Art photography is alien and intimidating to my family because it is outside their usual experience. Though art may be something they visit in museums while on vacation, they have not studied it in school. This lack of familiarity explains their apprehension with regards to their role as photographers. Although photography may be part of every family's experience, its function is generally confined within specific rituals, such as documenting events, people, and places dear to the family. The use of photography within the familial setting is to reassure individuals of their place among the family, not to show them as who they are outside the family. If photographs of unguarded moments happen to be captured on film, they are unceremoniously discarded. As Bourdieu explains:

Nothing *may* be photographed apart from that which *must* be photographed. The ceremony may be photographed because it realizes the image that the group seeks to give of itself as a group. What is photographed and what is perceived by the reader of the photograph is not, properly speaking, individuals in their capacity as individuals, but social roles¹⁹ [italics are Bourdieu's].

My family's perception of the importance of the final photographs as *art* often made them hesitant to construct too extreme a scenario and influenced their decisions such as the choice of film (black and white or colour). Because of colour film's pervasiveness in family photography,²⁰ the otherness of black and white photographs imbues the images with the pastiche of art. Undoubtedly the black and white *art* photographs family members have seen in my studio over the years only reinforced this impression.

In keeping with the idea of introducing my family to art-making, the final size of the prints was set to 30x45 inches and 30x30 inches for the square format image. Although many of the portraits are formally similar to snapshots (by being off-level, un-centred, out of focus, etc.), they transcend the limitation of snapshots by their situation within the context of the project and by their placement in the gallery space. The images were enlarged to make art-objects of them, thus changing my family's relationship to the photographs and further shifting the project photographs away from their preconceived notions of family photography.

3.3 *The photographs:*

Formally, the images in *Stéphane Lauzon... as himself* diverge from typical family portraits.²¹ Normally, family portraits, including the type of portraits my family have been used to taking, are shot with "people face on, in the centre of the picture, standing up, at a respectful distance, motionless and in a dignified attitude."²² According to Bourdieu,

typical family and popular portraits derive their composition and aesthetic from the limitation of the usual low-end equipment and lack of technical competence.²³ But in the context of my project it became acceptable for the family photographers to break the normative rules of popular portraiture or snapshot. The “artiness” of the project, either through its association to me as an artist or in the final use of the photographs in a gallery exhibition, imbued the photographers with the authority necessary to break the rules of family photography. This allowed the camera to become tilted, subjects to be backlit, images to be blurred, and photographs to be taken from the back or side. Consequently, the images are simultaneously family and non-family photographs.

Photographer Richard Avedon maintains that the surface image is all you have to photograph: the inner, private person is inaccessible to the camera, requiring the photographer to model the surface to reflect the inner person.²⁴ Thus the sitter must play a role in order to have his *surface* reflect his *inner person*. Avedon did a series of three photo shoots with people he admired: painter Francis Bacon and authors Jorge Luis Borges and Samuel Beckett. He was most pleased with Bacon’s portrait; in contrast, the other two portraits were less than desirable. “Borges gave an unphotographable performance, Beckett refused to perform and Bacon offered a perfect performance.”²⁵ Undeniably, portraiture has performative aspects where the sitter plays a role in partnership with the photographer. Expanding on the idea of portraiture as performance, Avedon said that performance isn’t *natural* or *unnatural* but good or bad.²⁶ This might in part explain why some people are more photogenic than others; they simply are better performers, more apt to play a role for the camera. Robert A. Sobieszek, curator of photography at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, compares photography and the self, as both are constructed, created and (or) assumed.²⁷ Consequently, portraiture is essentially artificial, constructed jointly by the

sitter who plays a role, and the photographer who captures the performance with the camera. In addition to functioning as portraiture, the photographs of me also function as self-portraiture because of my part in creating the system that led to the photographs. "In portraiture we frequently have the advantage, or at times, the disadvantage, of having an artist interpret for us the inner persona of the subject being depicted."²⁸ But with self-portraiture the onus is on the artist/photographer because the image comes from "a cycle of self-regard, self-representation, self-revelation, and self-creation."²⁹ Because of this cycle, the reading of self-portraiture is significantly different than that of portraiture. With self-portraiture, we must question the artist's motives in his/her self-representation.

In a different strategy of role-playing and self-representation, New York based contemporary artist Nikki S. Lee implants herself in different social and cultural communities. In *The Yuppie Project*, in order to befriend a group of yuppies, she dressed as a yuppie herself and inserted herself within the group. She has done similar projects with a Hispanic group, a swing-dancing group, and a lesbian group. Her belonging within these groups is only superficial and transitory. Her roles are also superficial, consisting mainly of wardrobe changes. She is no more Hispanic (being a Korean immigrant) than she is a yuppie or a lesbian. Lee's roles are window-dressing, for she plays at being someone else.

The roles I take on in *Stéphane Lauzon... as himself* are ostensibly based on me but, like Lee, are superficial. I am no more the person in the portraits than Lee is truly the person in her works. The roles played in my photographs are based on impressions of me derived from shared narratives between my family members and myself. These narratives are mutable, as are the identities that are constructed from them.³⁰ The act of snapping a photo, analogous to transcribing an oral history, freezes the narrative and finalizes it. The metaphor of freezing is appropriate since it not only preserves the narrative but also stops it

from moving forward or evolving. In contrast, our relationships are dynamic and prone to change as we accumulate more shared experiences and grow as individuals. Over time, the frozen narrative of the work will age, become dated, and eventually resemble pages from an album. Like the conventional family album, *Stéphane Lauzon... as himself* serves to present the oral history of a family. The whole installation becomes the photographic album. In combining the image, the label, and the text, the viewer is enabled to *hear*³¹ the narrative in the work.

3.4 The photographs of Stéphane Lauzon... as himself:

In all but one of the photographs in *Stéphane Lauzon... as himself* the images are of me posing for the camera, blatantly playing a role. My father is the only one who tried to disarm me in a candid context by having me prepare a meal while he talked to me. As we talked he nonchalantly took photographs.³² When faced with the prospect of acting natural



Figure 6: Paul Lauzon's photograph.

for a photograph, the subject, being too self-conscious, must “play” at being natural. The apparent contradiction of constructing natural poses becomes blatant in the work of Tina Barney, who takes “candid” photographs of her extended family. Ironically, the candidness of the photographs is a forgery. The representation of class plays an important role in Tina Barney’s work. She establishes class by the dress (or costume) of her subjects, and, more importantly, through the places where the photographs are taken. By showing people of privilege in seemingly unguarded poses she makes her elite subjects more accessible. She works by setting a large format camera (a very large and unsubtle piece of equipment) in a room and having people go around and do their business. When she sees something that she likes, she has them re-enact the scene so she can photograph it. Here the performative aspect of the portrait is hidden in the process and only becomes apparent when the process is known or deciphered through small hints in the images, such as when we see Barney holding an extended cable release (see *Tim, Phil, and I*, 1989). In contrast, the performance of *Stéphane Lauzon... as himself* is more apparent and readily discernible from the images. The diversity of my representations throughout the images suggests that I am interpreting different roles. The blatant oddness of some of my costumes suggests that they are more than a series of portraits on the wall; they hint at the performance that produced them. In the company of these and the other photographs of the project, even the *candid* photograph taken by my father can be read as performative. Just as in Barney’s work, the candidness of my father’s photograph is veneer; as we were talking and cooking I was aware of the camera’s presence and could not help but perform the role he expected of me.

Two images from *Stéphane Lauzon... as himself* present me juggling; both are profiles shot from below. It is not surprising that the family members who shot these photographs (Louise Hagel and Joceline Schreimer) have similar relationships to me (both

are aunts). They both have memories of me from before I have memories of myself. For both my aunts juggling is part of my history, something that they associate with my teenage years when they first saw me juggle. Louise uses juggling to represent me relaxing and Joceline uses juggling to represent my upbringing in Ottawa, as something I brought



Figure 7: Louise Hagel and Joceline Schreimer's photographs.
with me when I moved to Saskatoon. In these photographs the act of juggling serves to illustrate what becomes a greater theme in the rest of the project: history. Many family members saw me as someone serious with a playful side, like in Danielle Prefontaine's photograph of me dressed as a superhero, or Jenny Prefontaine's photograph of me dressed in a suit and surrounded by toys.

Another common theme represented in all the images is place. To quote J. Hirsch,



Figure 8: Jenny Prefontaine and Danielle Prefontaine's photographs.

"The places we photograph are our roots."³³ The places represented in family photography, usually as backgrounds, reveal a wider context to our lives, a sense of history and a general indication of class. In *Stéphane Lauzon... as himself* place becomes a stage upon which I play my role, using objects as narrative props that facilitate the presentation of familial history. For Joceline, her photograph juxtaposes my Ottawa upbringing with the Saskatchewan prairie, where my mother is from. My extended family sees me as a transient person, a person between two places; as Joceline puts it "you're foreign to Saskatchewan, but you're here because your roots are here."³⁴ My uncle, Lionel Prefontaine, echoes this sentiment by posing me as a farmer with my dog, going to work with a bottle. For him, my role in that photograph is evocative of place and of familial history. History and place are



Figure 9: Lionel Prefontaine's photograph.

intrinsically linked because narrative necessitates place and is forever linked to it. Saskatchewan has personal significance for most of my family; understandably, they wanted to imbue my photographic representation with it. Saskatchewan is where my family's roots are. Subsequently, our history is also linked to this place.

5. Conclusion:

On arriving in Saskatoon to begin my MFA I wanted to explore my relationship and sense of belonging to my extended family. Until recently, I have found that my art practice has served to alienate my family. With this project my goal was to collaborate with my extended family and allow them to see my world as an artist. My family's involvement in the project created a new forum for exchange between us and fostered, for me, a sense of belonging to the family group.

Although my family didn't participate in the whole process I allowed them significant control, so much so that I credit them as co-authors of the project. In addition to their central role as authors of the portraits, it is their roles as editors in selecting the images for the exhibition that merit them credit.³⁵ With *Stéphane Lauzon... as himself* I have balanced control and chance. Control is exerted before the project in establishing the system to be used, and, after the completion of the system, in placing the visual documents of the process within the gallery. The introduction of chance, a consequence of giving some control to my family, is oddly liberating. Because *I* established the underlying system of *Stéphane Lauzon... as himself*, I am ultimately responsible for its product. Photographs, labels, and text panels serve as evidence of the process and of my performances as myself. The gallery exhibition is under my control as it was I who moved the different documents of the process onto the walls; here, for the first time, I made aesthetic decisions. It is only through sharing creative control with my family that I was able to play the roles depicted in the photographs. It was in taking control over the taking and selection of the photographs that really gave my family insight into my life as an artist.

¹ Sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu describes in *Photography: A Middle-brow Art* the “appointed portraitist” whose role is to record childhoods, to create heirlooms and to solemnize important events. [See Bourdieu, 30]

² Baccalauréat en Arts Visuels, the French equivalent of BFA. I used BAV since my degree was completed in French and it is of significant personal importance as it shows my linguistic and cultural heritage (French Canadian) that has become almost invisible in Saskatoon.

³ A half-frame camera is a 35mm camera with a frame size half the “normal” 35mm camera. This allows the photographer to take twice as many photographs as a conventional 35mm camera but with corresponding loss in image quality.

⁴ Quoted from my 2002 statement used to apply for the MFA program at the University of Saskatchewan. The importance of this quote is in the position I took at that time and the eventual shifts that occurred in my practice bringing me to the work presented in this thesis exhibition. I will elaborate more on this shift as I explain my current work.

⁵ Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* describes this process of deciphering as he examines a photograph of his deceased mother. [99] Barthes is quite literal in his description where I use it more figuratively. Just as in Michelangelo Antonioni’s 1966 film *Blowup* there is nothing to look at when you get too close. The photograph doesn’t contain the personal significance of the image; it is the viewer that brings the significance to the photographic image.

⁶ Here Barthes is writing about his relationship to an old photograph of his deceased mother and, through the image, to his other descendants. [105]

⁷ In *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums*, a study of family albums at the McCord Museum, Martha Langford examines various structures of narratives in several case studies of albums. Langford concludes that photographic albums are not constructed in chronological, thematic, or biographical structures, but in a structure that is dependent on a narrator. Thus, the structure of the photographic album is that of oral tradition, flexible and dynamic, unique but always similar in every re-telling. Without the narrator, the viewer becomes his/her own narrator; viewing an album remains an aural experience.

⁸ J. Hirsch. *Family Photographs* , 6. It is no surprise that we are intrigued by family photography. When we are confronted by such images we seek to fill the narrative blanks left by them. This exercise is ultimately unsatisfying as there is no reward, only more questions. Such photographs leave us unfulfilled because they are only faint shadows of the people they represent without the immediacy of actual presence or interaction.

⁹ In “Mechanical Art, Natural Art: Photographic Artist” in *Photography, A Middle-brow Art*. [134] Chamboredon describes photographic aesthetes and the failure of such a practice. The failure only becomes apparent when “the photographer examines his or her practice and its value.” [135]

¹⁰ In their essay “Aesthetic Ambition and Social Aspirations: The Camera Club as a Secondary Group”, Robert Castel and Dominique Schnapper describe two types of camera clubs: the aesthetic club and the technologically inclined club, where camera club members are disciples of their respective club’s doctrine. [Bourdieu 105] The *technical culture* centred on the photographic apparatus, which frames the technologically inclined photographer’s view of photography. [Bourdieu, 126]

¹¹ To quote critic and author Susan Sontag, “to photograph someone is a sublimated murder — a soft murder”. [Sontag, 14-5] Indeed the act of photographing can be seen as violent as it transforms people into objects to be possessed by other people. Photographs are more than reminders of a person, they are also little portable effigies of people to be cherished or abused at the owners’ whim.

¹² This is a reference to a 1973 interview with conceptual artist Chris Burden, where he said “Getting shot is for real... there’s no element of pretence or make-believe in it,” referring to his 1971 performance piece *Shoot* in which Burden is shot in the arm by a friend with a rifle. [Carlson, 103]

¹³ From an interview LeWitt gave with Patricia Norvell in 1969. [Norvell, 114]

¹⁴ Robert C. Morgan cites Betite Vinklers in describing two modes of systems in artist Hans Haacke’s work. In the first case Haacke created systems exploiting physical principles and in the latter he “taps” into pre-existing social, political, and economic systems. [Morgan 107] It is the second case that is most relevant to my work.

¹⁵ In an interview Huebler gave to Norvell in 1969, Huebler equates art to “Systems being completed.” [Norvell, 149] Huebler is very conscious of creating closed systems that will at one point come to an end. In 1970 Huebler put one hundred \$100 bills into circulation with his initials on them; when the bills were returned to him in 1995 he exchanged them for \$1000 bills. Although lengthy in duration there was a termination date when the art objects (the \$100 bills) ceased to be art thus nullifying their added value, reverting the bills to their previous non-art state.

¹⁶ Conventional gallery labels would list the title (not the photographer’s name), the artist’s name (not the type of camera used), the date of production (not the location of the shoot), and medium (not a list of clothing worn).

¹⁷ Annotations of family photographs often consist of dates, names of the subjects and places; sometimes they might contain general information of the event such as “John’s birthday party.” But the information is generally vague and contingent on our knowing who the individuals are. Only rarely are full names given, such as John Smith, and only if the person is usually not part of the familial context.

¹⁸ Marianne Hirsch describes the *familial gaze* as a function of imposing and perpetuating typical family imagery. Although this idealised view of the family is relative to a specific cultural context, it is always present. [See M. Hirsch, 11]

¹⁹ Bourdieu, 24.

²⁰ “[Colour film] fulfils the aesthetic expectations of the working classes” [Bourdieu, 79] and as such it has become intrinsically linked to family photography. Because black and white photography has become foreign to normative, colour, family photography, it is perceived to have value as an artistic or aesthetic medium.

²¹ Julia Hirsch qualifies the family photograph as containing at least two people. [See J. Hirsch, 3] It is still possible though to describe the photographs of *Stéphane Lauzon... as himself* as family photographs because of the discernable presence of the family photographers in their roles in constructing the images.

²² Bourdieu, 80.

²³ See Bourdieu, 79.

²⁴ Avedon, “Borrowed Dogs” [17]: “you can’t get at the thing itself, the real nature of the sitter by stripping away surface. Surface is all you’ve got.”

²⁵ Avedon, 23-4.

²⁶ Avedon, 16.

²⁷ Sobieszek, 23.

²⁸ From Robert A. Sobieszek's essay "Other Selves in Photographic Self-Portraiture" from *The Camera I* catalogue. [21]

²⁹ Sobieszek, 21

³⁰ In her essay "'Storytelling the Self': Personal Narrative and Identity," Ruth Finnegan links self-identity to personal narrative. Because experience forms one's personal story, the ensuing narrative is closely linked to the self and identity. As we expand our personal narrative through lived experiences, our identities are prone to change. [See Finnegan, 91] Citing K. Woodward and S. Hall, Finnegan describes one possibility of self-identity construction as being built from similarities and differences in class, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, etc. [See Finnegan, 68] The differences between my family and I mostly revolve around ethnicity (or at least linguistic differences) and education. Age, gender, and urbanity were also factors in how we identified with each other. With these differences, shared history formed much of the framework for my family's construction of my roles.

³¹ "Hear", instead of "read", is used so as not to confuse my metaphor of storytelling.

Langford describes viewing a photograph album as aural experience because of the album's preferred viewing of an album with oral narrative by a presenter. Even in the physical absence of a presenter, viewing an album remains an aural experience because we become our own presenter.

³² Oddly, this is when I felt the most vulnerable throughout all the shoots; without the security of a role to play I was exposed. I had nothing to play but myself, or my constructed/projected self. There is a strange balance in being paid back for the candid photographs I took of my extended family throughout the years. To paraphrase Diane Arbus, I always thought of candid photography as a naughty thing to do — that was one of my favourite things about it. [In Sontag, 12] As I found out when I was candidly photographed, the reason that candid photography is naughty is that it takes place at somebody else's expense. In candid photography there is no chance for the subject to shield their vulnerable inner self from the harsh gaze of the camera.

³³ J. Hirsch, 59

³⁴ Taken from Joceline Schreimer's interview for *Stéphane Lauzon... as himself*. This quote appears on one of the panels used in the installation.

³⁵ Nigel Warburton argues that it is the act of selecting and editing a body of work that qualifies photography as art. Although my family did not create a body of work, they did contribute to one; accordingly, they have a share in it.

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