

WRITING WITH PHOTOGRAPHS:  
SPOKEN WORDS TURNED INTO PHOTO-TEXT  
IN THE SPIRIT OF PHENOMENOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

*This essay contests that photography is a companionable genre alongside narrative text when phenomenology is the research method. Images connect people with the universe because they are a magical reconstruction of reality. By using language to philosophically explain the experiential dimensional forms held within photographs, a comfortable marriage between existential and hermeneutic phenomenology can evolve. A mutual joining between text and photographic images as symbolic intentions can linguistically and visually construct and interpret a person's lived experience.*

INTRODUCTION

Photography, like Marxism, has a 'convoluted history of struggle within the question of abstraction and materiality' (Mills & Muellner, 2006, p.87). It is the making of pictures from the phenomena of light bouncing off objects in front of the camera that pulls together objects and subjects; the lens, camera, light and colours into an 'abstracted space of perpetual stillness' (p.57). It is this quiescence that offers much in a photograph; a contradiction between the here and now, the future and a passing moment frozen in time by the whirl of the shutter. Photographs are a translucent description of the here-and-now and offer more than what has been captured within the frame.

The chemical stillness of a photograph is different than that of any other textual medium or art form. Oil paint for example, tends to draw light into its folds and edges and reflect it back while watercolours frequently describe subtleness in a mix of fuzzy softness and bleeding tones as if the paint and paper have colluded to create images. The objects and subjects in a photograph however, cause subtle changes with light and dark shadows in the moment. The

digital picture acts as a voice in that it communicates something to the viewer through both representation and iconic abstraction. Images signify something tangible. Touching or smelling a photograph, on the other hand, is unlike any other art forms because it fails to enhance your artistic imagination. They are for the viewer's eyes and imagination only, and can act as *momento mori* facilitating the deepening of a person's sense of reality (Sontag, 2003).

In a phenomenological sense reading photographs can be similar to the act of phenomenological reduction. Through the process of interpretation and explication images evoke meanings to become part of the phenomenological theme; when 'the penny drops'. Phenomenology has been described as a research method that elicits these 'telling moments' (Kirova and Emme, 2006, p.11). It attempts to articulate content and form text from meanings embedded in the lived experience (van Manen, 1990). Reading a photograph successfully can be seen as giving it the phenomenological nod or being able to expand the representation and diversity of the photographer's voice (Hergenrather, Rhodes & Bardhoshi, 2009). This voice/representation can be hurried, busy, gentle, romantic, stylistic or subtle, or it can refer to an actual active event (for example, Hedley's boat picture in Figure 1).

Photography has been used as a way of constructing phenomenological symbols. In my own research, it also provided me with a sense of 'being in the



Figure 1. *Reflective Thinking* (Richardson, 2008)

moment' with participants as they described their lived experiences to me (Richardson, 2005).

The photographs upon which the current article is based were taken in a research project conducted in 2006 with terminally ill patients (Richardson, 2006). I created the photographs inspired by interviews with patients as they described their experiences while terminally ill. These photographs provided an important subjective and objective representation of patients' experiences. After considerable reflection and with a new research project on the horizon I decided to explore the philosophy around phenomenological images, and give them the legitimate scientific rigor and credibility that I felt was warranted. Iris Murdoch believes that art and philosophy are complementary and maintains that 'art is far and away the most educational thing we have [*because*] the statements made by art escape into the free ambiguity of human life' (Murdoch, 1978, p. 86–87). Thus the educative effect that art has on people can never be controlled, contained or underestimated because photography deepens our understanding of the world around us as it educates and informs our horizons.

Photographs are used to construct our histories and biographies. They provide a sense of context about where we have come from and can perhaps signal where we are going. They represent a form of patronizing reality that brings things from outside or 'out there' (Sontag, 1977, p. 80) into our own intelligible universe. People's worlds across many cultural and physical settings are 'brought inside' in photographs for us to see, to peruse and ponder or in some cases, merely glance at (Sontag, 1977). Within our own cultural context most of us understand and are familiar with a wedding photo; no matter whose wedding, we distinctly and instantly understand the meaning of what the people in the picture are doing. In the same way most of us connect with pictures of tragedies or phenomenal events that have happened in the past but may have little to do with our own small, immediate worlds. Photographs continue to educate and inform us of the world around us. This can be in a dramatic 'in your face' way that communicates much more effectively than the written word.

#### READING PHOTOGRAPHS

There is a dearth of information on how to read photographs philosophically. This process is made more difficult when the subjects and objects are not historical representations, and when the artist uses a mix of symbolic meaning, style and object to describe a moment of the lived experience through phenomenology. Using and analysing photographs is not only about creating pieces of art, but also about finding a method to more effectively engage with

their content and intent, and constructing meaning and clarity.

The photographs I present here were not just pictures, rather they were intended to describe a person's world. Little of what has been written about using photographs in research addresses the phenomenological aspects of images. Instead, literature tends to focus on photographs as a form of art therapy or simply as a form of notation, instruction or as aide memoire. Pictures not only fill the imagination with emotional responses but can also reach out and alter the conscious and unconscious thoughts through subtle implications.

Over the last decade photographic images have become an accepted method of collecting and analysing data. For example, 'photovoice' has become a popular method for recording the strengths and concerns of a cohort of people within a given community. This methodology provides a way for participants to present a community-based problem (Hergenrather, Rhodes & Bardhoshi, 2009). It provides an opportunity to critically reflect, create critical dialogue and share knowledge to those within the group, and to also communicate the lived experience to others beyond the group (Hergenrather, Rhodes & Bardhoshi, 2009; McIntyre, 2003). Photovoices are expressed through self-identified images, language and context (Wang, 1999). However, photovoice does not aim to make scientific sense of an image in a phenomenological way. In contrast, the aim of my own work is to understand and use photographs in a way consistent with Paul Thom's (2000) methodology (see below) of reading photographic images.

Sontag argues that artists *make* pictures or objects of art whereas the photographer *takes* photographs (2003, p.41). My photographs, however, resemble something that can be called photo-text or symbol-text. The objects were carefully chosen and arranged to create symbolistic suggestions as a vehicle for producing spoken or unspoken moments during the interviewing process. They are used as metaphors, invented styles and symbols that emerged both during the interviews, and in the subsequent interpretation of the text and review of the field notes. The photographs were sometimes collected during moments where words failed to convey what a person was trying to articulate. Sometimes photographs represented intuitive notions illuminating a person's lived experience.

#### CREATING A STYLE

The notion of style has long been associated with all genres of art. Photographers, like all artists, have their own stylistic conventions that run through

their own oeuvre or opus. Aestheticism comes from the word *aisthetikos* pertaining to the perception of an object, or a derivation of the moral principles from all that is beautiful. It is often associated with nineteenth-century romanticism and such scholars as Friedrich Schiller and Friedrich Nietzsche and their work on how we understand artistic styles. The notion of ‘style’ or ‘perceptual style’ is reported to be central to the philosophy of art and art history, and has normally been used to describe particular periods of art fashion or oeuvre, such as the Early Renaissance or Picasso’s Blue Period. Style can be described as a set of formal characteristics that cuts across periods, movements and individual oeuvres and is always attributed to artworks in retrospect (McMahon, 2003, p.260). Within my research project I have used the term a ‘symbolistic style’ to describe my own opus.

While the still life photograph ‘All Night Vigils’ (Figure 2) symbolizes ‘stillness’ this was not the intention. The photograph portrays a movement within the moment or a fluidity of happenings with the flickering flame.

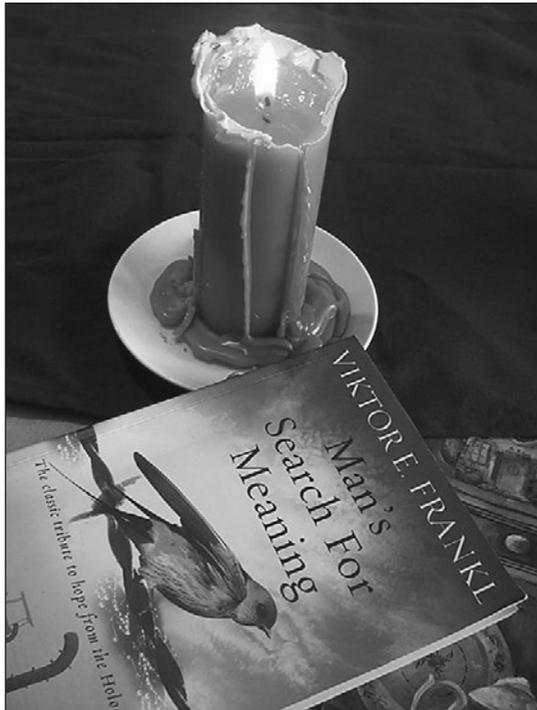


Figure 2. *All Night Vigils* (Richardson, 2008)

intention that viewers ponder the contextual reality of the objects and became emboldened to ask about the historical and socio-political meaning behind the picture. The tableau on the table cloth (Figure 2) represents the all night vigil that many families, friends and onlookers often undertake when someone is dying. It can be imagined that many hours of hopeful contemplation, of 'chewing the fat' and soul searching, and trying to understand the meaning of life takes place over a cup of tea or coffee. *All Night Vigils* has meanings within meanings as an symbolistic arrangement, or as Flusser describes it as 'textolatry' (2000, p.18). Media critic and philosopher Flusser believes that photography is a canny extension of language that represents a transformation in a person's consciousness, in the same manner as language grows and matures with a person's age and social and cultural situation. He suggests that literacy is a rationalist response to idolatry (Flusser, 2000, p.18), therefore photographs are a response to textolatry that can be further clarified by Edmund Husserl's (1900, 1913) phenomenology (Ihde, 1998).

#### PHOTOGRAPHY AS PHENOMENOLOGY

Stroud (2008) writes that the narrative has the ability to 'move individuals to thought, reflection, action, and belief' (p.19). When using photographs for photo-interviews, they are said to 'give birth to stories' and 'be employed as aids to data collection' (Rapport, Doel & Elwyn, p.534). We suggest that by using language to philosophically explain the experiential dimensional forms held within photographs, a comfortable marriage between existential and hermeneutic phenomenology evolves. Without using perceptual and hermeneutic phenomenology to explain the meaning behind each print, the images become merely a collection of things arranged pedantically. A mutual joining between text and photographic images within a phenomenological research context needs to linguistically and visually combined to 'communicate, create, and interpret (the) meaning' of a person's story (Kirova, 2006, p.23).

The final step from the camera to the page is the manipulation necessary to manufacture the right *look* or to give the images their artistic licence or symbolistic look. Edmund Husserl (1972) calls this process reduction, where the objects or subjects become 'phenomena in a peculiarly new sense' or are phenomenological-psychologically reduced (p.244). The phenomena that participants reveal through their dialogue or implied language is reduced to a theme, and with further reductive engagement and post-production manipulation a 'collage hermeneutics' is created both visually and textually (Kirova, 2006, p.24).

Sontag contends that photographs are a transparent account of reality (2003, p.72). Paul Thom's (2000) theory of interpretation, although sometimes criticised as being vague and poorly supported (Harold, 2003), supports this theorising about photographs. His theory of interpretation has three terminologies or compartments: object-of-interpretation or an intentional object; an object-as-represented; and a governing concept. The object-of-interpretation is the object in its original state or objects in their intended states such as the cup, candle and a book on a table cloth. But Thom intends for us to understand that the object of intention is 'identified via a set of features believed by the interpreter to apply to it' (p.20). Therefore, the intentional object may or may not correspond to a physical or external object. We can look at a work of art or a piece of music together but hear or see different things, thus we each encounter a different intentional object or, alternatively, if we see or hear the same thing or sound, we encounter an identical intentional-object (Harold, 2003, p.93). Thom's theory seems to allow that a sole interpretation can involve an infinite number of reflexive acts of interpretation all happening together (Harold, 2003, p.94). Husserl talks about a similar intentionality when he speaks about the way things are spread around us in space and time, and subjective 'how our conscious experience flows off in relation to things around us' (Woodruff Smith, 2007, p.234).

The 'object-as-represented' is the intentional object transformed into a tableau structured, selected or substituted, such as the manipulation of the articles in the previously mentioned photograph of a still life (Harold, 2003; McMahan, 2003). What is seen by the viewer is transformed consciously or unconsciously, with some parts remembered and others ignored. It is the parts that one takes to be relevant and salient or that may hold particular significance to the viewer that are remembered. Photographs of atrocities shock, inform, as well as corroborate evidence of textual accounts (Sontag, 2003). It is pictures that we often remember more readily than written text because they can be encapsulated and unencumbered, even if the meaning behind the content is complicated.

Thom's third category, the 'governing concept', is the concept that makes sense out of the objects or that gives the objects meaning. For example, in Figure 2 above, I have given the objects a stated meaning; I have not left it to the viewer to decide their meaning. At this point, the photograph takes part in story telling or as a thematic centre. The theme becomes the master key to understanding essential matters: place, time, intentionality, memory, aura, privacy, gains and losses (Trachtenberg, 1996). It is a way of guiding the viewer to see, through language, the intention of the photograph. In doing so, the photographer is able to shift the photograph from being a piece of art-work to being a

piece of scientific-thematic-intention.

Scientific-thematic-intentional writing has a way of separating the knower from the known, but at the same time allows us to reclaim this knowledge and turn it into our own pantology or vision (Richardson, 2005, p.47). Certain meaning is better expressed through *how* one writes than *what* one writes (van Manen, 1990), and when an instant or moment cannot be capture textually, a visual medium can become an important method of recording. 'Seeing' in the broadest sense means using your senses, intellect and emotions (Richardson, 2005, p.48).

#### THE CONCEPTION OF THE PHOTOGRAPH

Between 2008 and 2010 I conducted a study which explored the concept of hope among patients with terminal cancer, and the clinicians who cared for them. As part of the research, photographs were created following data collection and a review of the symbolic themes emerging from field notes'. The picture titled 'Forever Waiting' (Figure 3) depicts an old-fashioned telephone, heirloom baby shoes, a bird of paradise flower and an open kernel from a large seed. Its symbolic intention is to show how many hours the patient participants spent waiting for phone calls, for family members to visit and for grand-babies to be born. They were constantly waiting on appointment cards to arrive or doctors and nurses to arrive when symptoms became 'bad. Retrieving or recalling the essence of pictorial symbols is not a matter of simple analysis or explication, rather it is a reconstruction of a lifeworld. It shows a willingness to live the images of our lives more deeply and thoughtfully, as McMahan writes (2003).

McMahon (2003) suggests that artwork can be represented in several ways and that it is 'the artwork-as-represented-as-canonic-schemata-and-perceptual-form' that can be represented as perceptual style rather than art as an historical artifact (p.261). Using Thom's theory, an object is used to make sense of the context of meaning or 'gives... meaning in the sense that the meaning is invented' (McMahon, 2003). In this context, the governing concept of my photographs for the current research project represents hoping, unhope, mortality, aspects within the culture of palliative care, and endings or 'stepping off the mortal coil'. It is about understanding the legacy of an evocative image like the last word or 'employing photographs as vehicles to knowledge' (Rapport, Doel & Elwyn, p.534).

Solso (1994) describes art schemata as information that is stored in our long



Figure 3. *Forever Waiting* (Richardson, 2007)

term memory, such that we become accustomed to scenes or styles that we remember. According to Solso (1994) we are able to organize categories, themes and schemata within the human brain, thus contributing to our long term memory stores of art information (McMahon, 2003). Kant uses a similar theory in his accounts of aesthetic ideas. He believes that it is through our aesthetic perception of works of art that we are able to perceive the multifarious ideas that are stored within these artistic schemata.

#### THE MEANING BEHIND THE PHOTOGRAPHS

An expressive photograph stands on its own and makes an evocative and metaphorical impression on the viewer. A passionately created photograph

arranged, captured and produced on paper is intended to elicit emotional reactions from the viewer. The photograph 'Fans of hope' (Figure 4) evolved from a conversation in which a research participant talked about health professionals working in isolation with regard to her terminal disease. The participant talked about the doctors, nurses and herself being in 'silos' standing isolated from each other, with the concrete pad around each silo being the only thing linking them together. The concrete pad is a representation of the concretisation of cancer, of how it flows and crawls freely like hot wet concrete that then sets solidly around the base of the towering cylinders.

Instead of photographing a series of lifeless silos, I took a large fan tree palm with its individual funnel-like leaves. Each large fan represents the silo, but



Figure 4. *Fans of Hope* (Richardson, 2007)

instead of the static effect of huge metal cans the viewer is given the image of things moving from the outer rim of the leaves towards the ground. The leaves give the visual imagery of moving earthward, thus, helping to signify our eventual mortality. Each small fin of the fan indicates how a patient with a terminal disease can be touched by many people in an attempt to cure and care, comfort and palliate the person. The effect the leaves give of getting smaller and smaller further emphasizes the ever decreasing circles of living with terminal cancer. The background image of pink orchards represents the concrete pad with the tentative effect of pulling the fan's leaves downwards but also making some connections.

The entire process is marked by a 'defined discontent' as the metaphor elicits a feeling through the exchange of silent ideas. As my memories and mind images become embodied within my own personal choices in the pictures I make, I have the opportunity to clarify and realize changes through the images. This photograph illustrates the ability of the photographer to facilitate a receptivity that enables the viewer to be drawn into the photographic moment.

As we move through time we become creatures of a certain place, time and era. Photography, more than text, retrieves small shards of time and fudges it. Perhaps the measure of a great photograph is its ability to help us experience a priceless relief from mortality as we engage in an intense moment of reflection and introspection (Sontag, 1977). So much so, that we have a sense of being outside ourselves, even for the eternity of a moment (Richardson, 2005, p. 50).

The participants in my project represent more than just words on a page but an eternal moment of visibility. Because the ten patient participants were facing death, they spoke of the vigils that families and friends had done with them and of re-making connections that had sometimes been lost. It was a time for soul searching and confiding very private thoughts and untold events. When participants were close to dying there were sometimes 'fences to mend' and some were reflecting on 'what was the meaning or the point of life?' Figure 5 represents this soul searching. As already mentioned, phenomenology is about theme-making so that we can make sense of what has been both spoken and unspoken. Meaning emerges as the text and interpreter engage in a dialogue, or in a hermeneutic conversation (Koch, 1998). It is at the intersection between the photographer, viewer and participant that meaning is created.

It is this understanding, reconstruction, advocacy and activism that help us to learn (Koch, 1998; Gadamer, 1976). Story-telling gives us a different understanding. Parse (1990) calls this process 'extracting essence' from the translated



Figure 5. *Soul Searching* (Richardson, 2008)

descriptions or the participant's language. An extracted essence is a complete expression of a core idea described by the participant (Parse, 1990, p.11). In attempting to discover the themes in the present research, it was necessary to identify what were essential and incidental themes. It was about finding out what was left behind when we pared back the narrative, like stripping layers from the ginger flower.

In using the hermeneutic circle the themes revealed themselves as being unique to the phenomenon of concern. There are two types of hermeneutic enquiry: one enumerates, compares and contrasts, creates and tests hypotheses, draws on past literature and studies, and examines the minutiae of materials or systems of one set or another (Kellman, 2005). The other method involves



Figure 6. Torch Ginger, *Etlingera elatior* – Pink. Botanical Gardens, Darwin  
(Richardson, 2007)

exploring the individual, the idiosyncratic and the unique, the symbolic and the artful. It is the latter hermeneutic enquiry that can be used to describe how works of art express lived experience scientifically (Kellman, 2005). At the heart of the phenomenological approach is a critique of the subject-object split of scientific naturalism with phenomenology dissolving the Cartesian distinction between subject and object (Crotty, 1996).

Phenomenology has been described as a difficult and tortuous research method that brings to mind Henry James' comment about philosophy being 'like a blind man in a dark room looking for a black hat that is not there' (Murdoch, 1959, p. 249). It is the activity of being in the moment, the study of consciousness from the first-person perspective.

Dr D, one of the research participants and a palliative specialist, talked about the understanding of human existence and being conscious of 'something'. His 'something' was the impact that Eastern cultures have had on his current practice and how he treated patients, particularly those that were facing impending death.

Working internationally, especially in Thailand, has helped me to

understand each person's cultural and religious context and [*that*] you have to talk about hope in the context of each particular person. When an Asian person dies many of them believe that they will be reincarnated and come back as a better person. (Dr D)

His symbolic photograph in Figure 7 embodies this mixing together of two cultures. It reflects a conversation we had about how he loved the view when driving to work and how spiritually motivated he felt when he looked at the coastline. This is the same view that many early Chinese people saw as they steamed up the harbour for the first time as new immigrants. Chinese dragons traditionally symbolise potent and auspicious powers, particularly control over water and rainfall. The dragon is also a motif of power, strength and hope (Wang, 2002). With this in mind I layered the door knocker over a coastal landscape to create this 'East meeting the West' photograph. The photograph also creates a sense of things blending and melding in togetherness, and of hopefulness.

Hope is always through the eye of someone else and for many of the clinicians who took part in this research project, hope was about maintaining emotional equilibrium, and being a personal motivator and protector while aiming for an ideal outcome. Hope was about being motivated to work at trying to ame-



Figure 7. *When East Meets West* (Richardson, 2008)

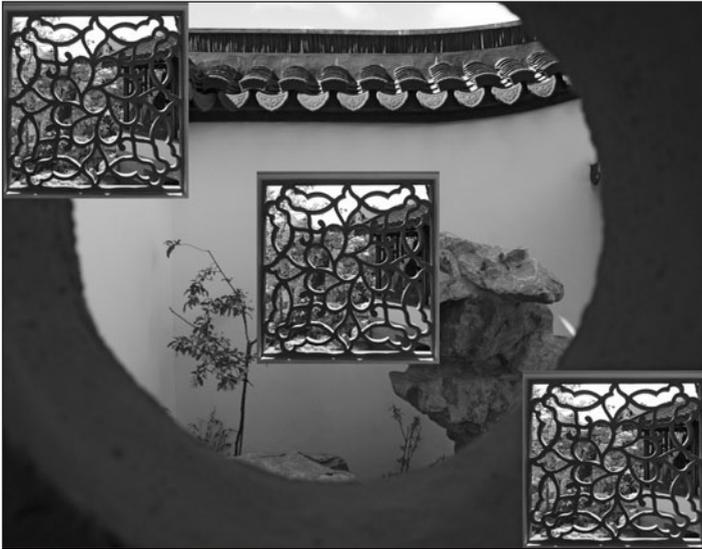


Figure 8. *Looking to the Other Side of Life* (Richardson, 2008)

liorate symptoms, motivating patients into ‘good spaces’ psychologically so they could tackle the next phase or stage of the illness continuum or journey. Sometimes the disease state would remain stable and other times it was wild and aggressive. Figure 8 signifies this sense of looking through the window into someone’s soul. The photograph is about looking through to the ‘other side’ and trying to maintain emotional equilibrium and a sense of being at peace with oneself.

Figure 9 represents the tiny, tiny window of opportunity or sliver of hope that Kowhai (a patient) believed she had if she undertook treatment for her type of non-curative cancer. The blue of the iris against the grey of the dilapidated window is my notion of hope. As time goes on this sliver gets smaller and smaller, and this is represented by the flowers disappearing into nothing. Figure 10, ‘Optimism Amongst the Undergrowth’, describes Kowhai’s feelings of optimism. This lone iris stands apart from the rest of the garden blooming in the midst of intense heat where most other flowers have withered and died. As she suggests:

The more things that you have chucked at you in life I believe it makes you a lot, lot stronger... The only thing is to try and extend the time you have got left. (Kowhai)



Figure 9. *A Sliver of Hope Through a Window of Opportunity* (Richardson, 2008)



Figure 10. *Optimism Amongst the Undergrowth* (Richardson, 2008)

Kowhai's images represented to me the notion of standing up against adversity.

Hedley, another patient, appeared to hold onto a sense of realism. He understood being realistic as having a strong practical understanding and acceptance of his world, as he describes:

My concern is more about an ongoing problem that means if I don't have any quality life I don't do anything. I don't want to be an invalid for the rest of the time that I have. I wouldn't want that at all. The resection offers the best hope of cure but that has the most risk of dying as a result of the operation. (Hedley)

He spoke about wanting to maintain his fairly active lifestyle and was quietly optimistic that his life would not have to change too drastically:

...Obviously I would like to be fit and well again, I also realize that I am nearly seventy seven so how well can you be at seventy seven. I still like to lead an active life and do the things I like doing. (Hedley)

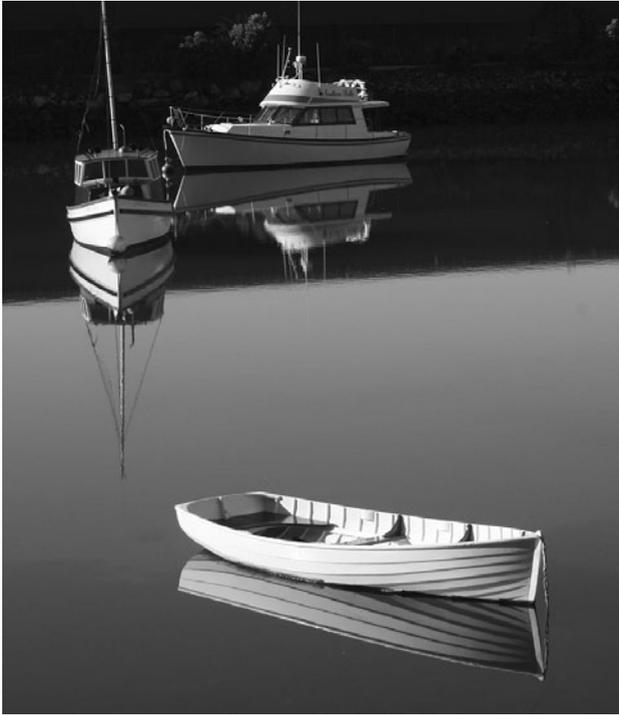


Figure 11. *Reflecting on Life* (Richardson, 2008)

Hedley became very reflective but realistic about his life and what the future held for him, especially when preparing for drastic interventions such as having a radical resection of his liver. But, he says:

In between chemotherapy sessions when there have been good days I would go kayaking... It is a big decision to make, it is your life that you are dealing with but on the other hand I have got to make it by Monday so it just might come to the flip of coin.

Hedley commented:

I'm not worried about death. Either you're dead and that's it... Ah I'm perhaps more concerned about things going wrong and living the rest of my life in pain and destroying what quality of life you have got left. That's really the situation that I am in at the moment where I have got to make a choice which has got the least risks.



Figure 12. *Marooned* (Richardson, 2008)



Figure 13. *The Mirror Image of a Becalmed Mooring* (Richardson, 2008)

Hedley died before I could give him his photographs, but they were given to his family. It was reported that he never gave up hope, right until he died. Each day he thought there just might be a chance that he would beat his disease. I have chosen to use marooned and becalmed boats in Figures 12 and 13 to portray Hedley's plight because he felt he was in 'no man's land'. He thought he would die if he did nothing but might also die from the treatment options. For a split second in his life Hedley had to stand still and take stock of what was before him; the two boats describe this poignantly by their gentle, calm remoteness. They also illustrate Hedley's love of the sea and boats which had been a big part of his life.

Anna talks about being optimistic enough to go camping with her friends:

If I can get back to going out once a week with that and go away to camp with the friends that I have, yes that is something that I want to do.

This is represented by the imagery in Figure 14, 'A Tramping We Will Go' which was the pictorial image based on Anna's transcript. It represents the anticipation and optimism of getting back to walking around the tramping sites after chemotherapy for bowel cancer. Each picture attempts to elicit an idea of



Figure 14. *Gone Bush* (Richardson, 2008)



Figure 15. *A Tramping We Will Go* (Richardson, 2008)

freshness and of being outside in nature with the world at our feet. Figures 14 and 15 describe the strength that Anna wanted back. The symbolic meaning is the image of a 'good keen Kiwi' enjoying the crisp blue yonder. Its imagery is a reminder of all things beautiful, and the idea of not taking anything in life for granted, and trying to live life as fully as possible despite the odds.

Health professionals, especially doctors, play a central role when a person has a terminal illness. I have chosen to express this role by the small still life in Figure 15, that I have titled 'The Doctor's Visit'. It is one of the few photographs that need little explanation and has been included because many of the participants were ever hopeful that when the doctor visited that he or she might give them good news about their test results. Most were hopeful that the treatment they were receiving would change their 'numbers' (that is, their chances of survival), thus changing their prognosis. Morris describes his doctor to us briefly:

Well, I have always been very impressed with Dr W... He is just like a friend when he sits and talks to you. He is pretty honest with what he says... My numbers have stayed pretty good and things are progressing well.



Figure 16. *The Doctor's Visit* (Richardson, 2008)

#### PHOTOGRAPHY AS A CONCLUSION

An expressive photograph stands on its own and exerts a metaphorical impression on the viewer. Through metaphor and symbolic meaning I have used photographs to speak from within and tell variants on a theme through symbols. Much the same as a gatherer of artefacts or memorabilia, as a photographer I am driven by an inner passion that is linked to historical events and the past. Photographs in this instance are a confirmation of the thereness or a person's theirness.

More often than not, photographs do not prove that the photographer is either good or bad at capturing a certain moment or image, they just offer up the objects or subjects for people to look at. But it is the picture's justification and scientific reading that matters most. This intended thereness and theirness of the photographs also included the final journey of giving or gifting the collected data back to the participants. These excerpts of photo-text were primarily about other people's *theirness*, their stories. This photographic method

explored the individual, the idiosyncratic, the unique, the symbolic and the artful.

All patient participants received a series of three photographs in a wooden frame and a copy of their transcripts within four months of the interviews. Time was of the essence and after I produced the images and processed them they were lovingly swaddled and packed carefully to avoid damage. I drove from one end of the country to the other within eight days, stopping off at each destination. It was a pilgrimage to gift back what I felt was rightfully theirs, but it was also nerve racking because as in all artistic genres, I was unsure whether the participants would like or dislike the artwork.

While the gifting process was exciting, it mixed with immense sadness when I discovered some participants had died. The ten patient participants had all seemed relatively well considering their prognosis when I first interviewed them and I imagined that most of them would have had at least another twelve months or so to live. I had not prepared myself well for this part of the results dissemination, and at the time of writing nine out of the ten patient participants had died.

Photographs as a scientific tool must be used to deepen our historical and educative character, and more importantly, represent the eternal moment of visibility. Each photographic shot must act as a beginning, middle and an end in itself but must also be an extension of language. The nature of framing each picture was a process that, just like language, brings things from outside the viewers' known world to educate and inform the viewer, to create controversy, understanding and wonder. Each framed piece encapsulated a person's moment. Using the same phenomenological and hermeneutic process that is necessary to reveal textual themes, each picture brought an artistic dimension to the spirit and philosophy of phenomenology.

Phenomenology allows us to enter into the experience of another through reflective revelations. To understand a person living in their world requires a phenomenological sensitivity to *the* lived experience. Symbols and themes were produced from modern phenomenology by teasing out themes from webs of words articulated through spoken and written language. This study used symbolism and the symbolic form as a means of clarifying and making transparent participants' experiences, both spoken and unspoken. In this way, the article attempts to provide access to the intrinsic essence of the lived experiences of patients with terminal illness.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Kate Richardson is a PhD student at Deakin University, Melbourne and Rod MacLeod is one of her supervisors. Kate Richardson is the primary researcher on this project and has taken all the photographs, interviewed participants and interpreted the transcripts. Rod MacLeod had input into the early stages of the work, had correspondence during the data collection period and helped construct the manuscript.

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