In memoriam

Christian Edward Dailey

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses
LEO J. DAILEY, 52, of Winterberry Drive, a partner in the law firm of Nolan and Dailey for the last 24 years, was stricken Monday and died at home. He was the husband of Mary G. (Aquino) Dailey.

Born in Providence, a son of Margaret (Fitzgerald) Dailey of Cranston and the late Leo A. Dailey, he had lived in Coventry since 1973, previously having lived in Cranston.

Mr. Dailey was a 1964 graduate of Providence College and received his law degree from Fordham University Law School in 1967. He was a member of the New York Bar, the American Bar Association, the New York State Bar Association and the Rhode Island Bar Association.

He was president of the Pawtuxet Valley Rotary Club in 1978 and 1979. He had served as treasurer of the Coventry Republican Town Committee and was a member of the Coventry Charter Review Commission.

Besides his wife and mother he leaves a son, Christian E. Dailey of Coventry; three sisters, Dolores Burns and Deborah Dailey, both of Cranston, and Maureen Holman of Warwick.

The funeral will be held Friday at 9 a.m. from the Robert A. Iannotti and Sons Funeral Home, 415 Washington St., with a Mass of Christian Burial at 10 in SS. John and Paul Church, South Main Street. Burial will be in St. Joseph Cemetery, West Greenwich.

DAILEY, Leo J., Esq.

In Memoriam

Graduate Thesis
MFA in Imaging Arts
Rochester Institute of Technology

by Christian Edward Dailey

March 1996

Thesis board members;

Angela Kelly, Thesis Chair, Associate Professor, SPAS

date 3/29/96

Patti Ambrogi, Associate Professor, SPAS

date 3/29/96

Michael Starenko, Adjunct Professor, SPAS

date 3/29/96
# Table of Contents

Introduction................................. 1

Personal History.................................. 2

The Making and Meaning of *In Memoriam*............ 7

Influences and Historical Context  
of *In Memoriam*.................................. 16

Closing........................................... 20

Appendix A  
My Father's Letters.............................. 23

Appendix B  
Newspaper article and death certificate....... 29

Slide Section..................................... 32
Introduction

Events in an artist's life can sometimes significantly shift the course of their work. The sudden, unexpected death of my father in July of 1994, combined with the circumstances surrounding his death, made it difficult to place importance on my past endeavors in photography. What began as a cathartic way of dealing with his loss, gradually evolved into my thesis exhibition entitled In Memoriam. Incorporating highly personal elements from my life into my work was new territory for me, and antithetical to almost everything I had done before. But as the show developed, broader layers of meanings and associations began to form that gave In Memoriam many points of access for the viewer. It is a memorial to my father, but it conveys a more general narrative of a journey from life to death. Within these contexts, the concept of the family secret is also invoked, bringing forth the darker, negative elements that are present in almost every family's history, buried deep to be forgotten. But before I expound on the circumstances and influences that shaped In Memoriam - as well as the meanings behind it - I will give a brief history of my artistic development, leading up to the events that altered its course.
Personal History

I became introduced to the world of fine art photography at a small, conservative, Catholic college. Throughout my undergraduate years, my photographs were almost exclusively in black and white. I became an obsessively meticulous black and white printer. I bought my own trays for fear that the college's old trays would introduce contaminate, toned with selenium for image permanence, utilized an archival washer to thoroughly cleanse my prints, and followed archival procedures for mounting, matting, and framing my work. This obsessiveness was driven by the romantic notion that the art object must outlast the artist in order to give him or her immortality. I also thought in terms of an art market that values archivally processed, limited edition photographs.

These purist proclivities were combined with a surrealist sensibility. I worked mainly in the studio or at a location where I could control the situation and/or introduce props. The initial motivation behind most of my work was to make off kilter images that were either humorous or slightly nightmarish, but vague enough for viewers to inject their own narratives.

When I happened upon some of Joel-Peter Witkin's images in a photography book, I took an instant liking to them. He is easy to romanticize - he is the madman toiling in his studio with macabre props, and bevies of freaks, corpses, and perverts. His technique of scratching negatives and splattering prints with chemicals to mimic the look of an old daguerreotype yielded a monoprint, a one of a kind precious art object. This printing method appealed to my capitalistic sense of art making. The work of Witkin, and Ralph Eugene Meatyard as well, became the inspiration for incorporating
masks, dolls, and other strange props into my work.

The art department of the small college I attended was not, understandably, a radical hotbed of ideas on the cutting edge of postmodern theory. I had a vague knowledge of a few postmodern artists, most notably Cindy Sherman. However, I was unaware of the scope of the movement, even though my college career spanned from 1985 to 1989 when it was at its peak.

The closest introduction I had to postmodernism came from Anne Hoy's book Fabrications: Staged, Altered, and Appropriated Photographs. It became a significant tome for me since it put my work into a critical context, introducing me to A. D. Coleman's concept of the "directorial mode" in photography: staging or constructing a tableaux to be photographed. Hoy's book is a compilation of postmodern and, what she terms, late modernist photography, as she explains in her introduction:

Those photographers who hybridize can be considered late modernist, for they still support the conception of the artist as a creator and self as unitary, while they seek to enrich their expression through adopting forms from other arts. They take their cues from painting and printmaking, the premodernist history of art, alternative traditions such as Surrealism, and vanguard experiments from the 1960s on, including Conceptual art, Happenings, Performance, and body art. The artists antagonistic to modernism, on the other hand, have been termed postmodern by critics. Indifferent to traditional themes, these artists nod to precedents in Pop art as they look to the media for their subjects and styles—to best-sellers, hit plays and movies, and the most popular magazines, television shows, advertising, shop window displays, and product packaging. Convinced that individual invention is irrelevant in art, postmodern photographers present the stereotypes of mass culture for critique. While late modernist photographers look inward, plumbing the imagination or subjective states and expressing them with a variety of fine-art means, postmodern photographers survey the imagery of public life and analyze the self-conceptions that the media urge the public to assume. The late modernist artist resembles an impresario, the postmodernist an art director or pasticheur. While the first constructs new realities, the second deconstructs the simulacra circulated for mass consumption.

Hoy’s concepts of late modernism and narrative tableaux as a format for expressing the artist’s imagination quickly intertwined with my influences from Witkin and Meatyard, both of whom were discussed in Fabrications. But there were many other artists in Fabrications whose work I paid no heed: Sherry Levine, Vikky Alexander, Robert Heinecken, and Barbara Kruger, to name a few. Having never read Hoy’s text on these artists, I was confused when encountering a Vikky Alexander piece at an exhibition in 1988, wondering why she had photographed a fashion model and presented images of her in triplicate. As an young modernist, I assumed that any photograph on a gallery wall had to be taken by that artist. The idea that Alexander had appropriated the image from a fashion magazine in order to critique or deconstruct the media’s depiction of women would have been lost on me at that time.

After receiving my undergraduate degree in 1989, I began working with Polaroid transfers and other alternative processes. The Polaroid transfer appealed to my notion of the photograph as a precious art object. This technique produced a monoprint which gives it more value on the art market. Its uniqueness combined with its deteriorated and painterly qualities make it akin to a Witkin print. I continued utilizing masks, dolls, and other bizarre props. Gradually the pieces evolved into religious farce. Arranging transfers into grids to form variations on the crucifixion, I “crucified” ventriloquist dummies and a nude with a demon mask, amongst other variations. Although intended as humorous and irreverent, they were also a quasi-rebellion against sixteen years of Catholic education.
I continued with Polaroid transfers at the start of graduate school. I began constructing large grids of appropriated images from Western religious paintings that I arranged into categories: the crucified and resurrected Christ, angels, and the Madonna and Child. I would insert my own version of each genre somewhere in the grids: a dummy floating up to heaven, two dummies in the pose of the Madonna and Child, etc.

Although I was appropriating, it was by no means an effort to be considered postmodern. These pieces were more parody than pastiche - they were crafted, precious art constructions that fell short of any kind of deconstruction of media images. Their aesthetic appeal reflected more ambivalence or uncertainty than an outright irreverence towards religious belief. Eventually, I employed digital imaging to create bizarre manipulations of these religious icons. But this continuation of tongue-in-cheek sacrilege was also becoming quite gimmicky.

I abandoned Polaroid transfers near the close of my first year of graduate school in order to explore 3-D photography. But again the medium seemed to be overriding the message. I finished the first year confused about what I was trying to do and say.

At the beginning of my graduate studies, I had learned that my father was under indictment. My father - an attorney - had a client who was taking out a loan from a credit union to buy a piece of property. His client conspired to "bump up" the loan, which meant filing papers with the lender that bore an overinflated value for the property, thereby giving him a significant surplus of money far beyond what he needed to make the
purchase. Since my father had handled the paperwork, he had allowed himself to become entangled in his client's deception. This act of fraud was considered a federal offense and it sparked an FBI investigation when it was discovered. If he was found guilty, the potential of being disbarred, paying huge fines, or going to prison was tremendous. To make matters worse, these events became front page news for the local newspaper.

During the summer that followed my first year of graduate studies, I drove for the first time from Rochester to visit my parents in Rhode Island - in the past I had flown. At the end of my eight-hour drive, I had become lost, oddly enough, in my own hometown. Due to the direction I was coming from, I had wound up in a section of the town with which I was unfamiliar, a factor further complicated by narrow roads winding through seemingly endless woodlands devoid of any landmarks. Learning of my weak navigation skills, my father offered to lead me back to the main highway on the day of my return trip. When the day arrived, I followed him as planned, and as the ramp onto the highway came in sight, he pulled over and stopped. I would have continued on if I had not noticed his motioning me to pull over as well. He walked over to my car, told me to have a safe trip and to call home when I made it back to Rochester - then we said goodbye. That day would be the last time I would see him alive. A few hours after leaving me, he was stricken with an aortic aneurysm which ended his life in minutes. My mother would come home to find him dead on the floor of their bedroom. His trial would have been the following month and the stress this reality was causing him was more than likely a contributing factor in his death. Later, my mother and I
would learn of the rumor going around our town. Some people were saying that he had committed suicide. This disturbing news made dealing with his death even more unbearable.

The Making and Meaning of *In Memoriam*

The genesis of my thesis show came from a single photograph. Around the time of my father's funeral, my mother began rummaging through copies of letters my father had written years ago as well as old photographs. She came across a small packet of 4x5 proofs from her wedding. These images were the rejects that never made it into her wedding album and I was fascinated by them, having never seen them before. Since these photographs had been improperly processed, they were severely darkened and deteriorated. While perusing them, I came upon one image that was extremely unsettling. The photo was taken after the wedding reception, shortly before my parents were to embark on their honeymoon. It shows my father stretched across a couch with his hands draped over his torso and his head in my mother's lap. Due to the deterioration process, a rectangular shape had formed around his body. This element, combined with the pose, became evocative of a corpse in a casket; my mother's dress underneath his head resembled the fabric lining of a casket's interior. Their pose also brought to mind nineteenth century postmortem photographs which often depicted young mothers cradling their deceased children as if they were sick or asleep. Daguerreotypes from this period "often echoed conventions of family portraiture...to
reconstruct and preserve the domestic unit."² It was a paradox that a medium heralded—especially during the nineteenth century—as being the definitive means of capturing reality was often employed to create such illusions by the professional photographer. The wedding photograph is also a fabrication. My mother has a cloth pressed to my father’s brow, suggesting she is nursing his headache after the festivities. The image, however, is one of the many absurd scenarios orchestrated by the photographer. Postmortem photographers utilized certain poses to make the deceased appear alive; ironically, the wedding photographer, during his documentation of this joyous occasion, made use of a presumably stock pose which would mutate years later into a premonition of death.

My discovery of this photograph parallels, in certain ways, Roland Barthes’ discovery of the Winter Garden Photograph, a picture of his mother as a child that he came upon shortly after her death. He gives this account in Camera Lucida: “There I was, alone in her apartment where she had died, looking at these pictures of my mother, one by one, under the lamp, gradually moving back in time with her, looking for the face I had loved. And I found it.”³ In his state of mourning, he was searching for a photograph that had captured the essence of her personality: “In this little girl’s image I saw the kindness which had formed her being immediately and forever, without her having inherited it from anyone.”⁴ What Barthes experiences from looking at the face of

⁴ Camera Lucida, p. 69.

8
his mother when she was five years old, is, as he terms it, a **punctum**: an element of a photograph that "wounds" or "pricks" the viewer, creating an emotional response. Barthes, however, does not reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph in *Camera Lucida* for the benefit of the reader. According to him, an outsider could only engage the image at a level he refers to as the **studium**, the cultural or evidential aspects of a photograph:

I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousands of manifestations of the "ordinary"; it cannot in anyway constitute the visible object of science; it cannot establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your **studium**: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound.\(^5\)

The wedding photograph of my father on the couch contains a **punctum** for me, but on a much broader level in comparison to Barthes' epiphany before the Winter Garden Photograph - broad enough that an outsider may gain a sense of it as well. The picture predates me, as Barthes' image predates him. This distance in time does not impede him from finding the spirit of his mother in the photograph. But the distance in time has the opposite effect for me. In a figurative sense, I do not recognize my parents in this picture, but rather, I see a young couple at the start of their life together. They exude an innocence - there are a multitude of possibilities before them. For me, part of the **punctum** comes from the knowledge that this couple will be shattered by a tragedy. The deteriorated look of the photograph enhances this sense of foreboding. This deterioration is, of course, an element never recorded by the camera, a fact that may bend Barthes' definition of **punctum** considerably. However, the rectangular shape surrounding my father's body is the point that

\(^5\) *Camera Lucida*, p. 73.
"pricks" (to coin his term) the most. It possesses an unshakeable eeriness. I wondered how long the photograph had sat in the packet in that condition, prophesying his untimely death.

Obviously, the sense of tragedy I derive from the wedding photograph is more vivid for me than for an outsider. But the outsider can engage this image and the other appropriated snapshots found in In Memoriam on a more general level. As Barthes later states in Camera Lucida: "I now know that there exists another punctum (another "stigmatum") than the "detail." This new punctum, which is no longer of form but intensity, is Time..."6 He elaborates further:

In 1895, young Lewis Payne tried to assassinate Secretary of State W. H. Seward. Alexander Gardner photographed him in his cell, where he was waiting to be hanged. The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the studium. But the punctum is: he is going to die. I read at the same time: This will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What pricks me is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die; I shudder, like Winnicott’s psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.7

Many of the photographs utilized in In Memoriam were selected because of the generic scenarios they depicted - a child in front of a birthday cake, a shot of grandma, a family portrait. They are archetypal snapshots that employ all the conventions of family photographs, making them accessible to anyone with snapshots of their own; anyone who can then project his or her own memories and associations. When this universal snapshot aesthetic is seen in the light of Barthes' second version of the punctum, In Memoriam

6Camera Lucida, p. 96.
7Camera Lucida, p. 96.
becomes a more expansive reflection on remembrance, death, and the fear of death for ourselves and our loved ones, rather than being exclusively connected to my own family's tragedy.

The wedding photograph became my starting point for using the family snapshots that comprise the bulk of imagery of In Memoriam. In a certain sense, this image was a dead photograph - it had degenerated to the point of barely being able to convey the information it was meant to record. My only means of resurrecting it, since there was no negative, was to rephotograph it in order to make a new print. By adjusting the density and contrast of the new print, I was able to pull out an acceptable amount of detail without sacrificing the image's original look of decay. Working from a copy negative facilitated recropping the image. When I began copying other photographs from the wedding proof packet, recropping, in some instances, would play a vital role in changing their meanings. The process of making a new print also gave me the opportunity to make minor alterations. Angling tracing tissue over the printing paper during exposure helped to obscure areas of an image I wanted rendered nondescript. I could also write on the tissue and place it flat on the print during exposure to introduce text. In its first incarnation, the image of my father on the couch bore the phrase, "It looks like he has a smile on his face," a common expression mourners often use to create a denial of death when viewing a dead body. For me, displaying this image as a simple black and white print was not enough. I decided to use photographic material with a translucent base so the image could be back lit. Having light glow from the image, while displaying it in a darkened space, would create an ambience of solemnity; it
would transform itself into a shrine; the figures within it would become specters, an enhancement to the already mysterious box-like shape.

I began perusing the rest of the wedding proofs as well as family snapshots in an effort to find other puncta, missed forewarnings, or ironies. Due to the great quantity of snapshots in my family archive, it had been difficult to put them all into albums. As a result, many of the photographs were not in proper chronology and were haphazardly stored in plastic packets and envelopes. Constructing a family history from this chaos would have been a daunting task. Photos without dates can present problems with sequencing; selecting and editing images can be a process that sometimes boils down to an arbitrary decision.

During my search, I came upon several photographs - ones I would later use in In Memoriam - which took on new meanings and associations in the context of my father's death. In a photograph culled from the wedding proofs, the photographer had again orchestrated another absurd scenario - a tug-of-war in which my father is being pulled away from my mother by the bridesmaids; my mother, who is being held back by the groomsmen, is reaching her hand out to him. During my reprinting process, I decided to crop out the wedding party to accentuate the image's ironic and prophetic qualities. But the rest of the photographs I selected required little or no manipulation to be poignant: my parents as teenagers dressed for their prom, an interior shot of the church where they were married, two shots of my father on his honeymoon, and a picture of my mother sitting on a couch in my parent's first apartment. When arranged into their chronological sequence, these
photographs possessed the typical narrative elements of any family photo album. As Annette Kuhn notes in her essay "Remembrance":

Family photographs are quite often deployed - shown, talked about - in series: pictures get displayed one after another, their selection and ordering as meaningful as the pictures themselves. The whole, the series, constructs a family story in some respects like a classical narrative - linear, chronological; though the cyclical repetition of climatic moments - births, christenings, weddings, holidays (if not deaths) - is more characteristic of the opened-ended narrative form of soap opera than the closure of classical narrative. In the process of using - producing, selecting, ordering, displaying - photographs, the family is actually in the process of making itself.²

On one level, related to Barthes' notion of the studium, the image sequence forms an idealized narrative of love and matrimony; a couple who were high school sweethearts get married, go on their honeymoon, and start their life together. It is one of the "climatic moments" of which Kuhn speaks.

The pictures of my father on his honeymoon trip were shot with a camera that rendered everything in a soft focus haze, giving them a dreamlike romanticism. In one photo, his almost nondescript form stands on a steamship's white gangplank that appears to glow under his feet. The second photo shows him crouched on a rock in a shimmering forest. In the context of his death, the ethereal characteristics of these images take on new associations; the gangplank suggests the tunnel of light into heaven; the figure on the rock, the soul in Paradise. But with these new associations, the image sequence forms a different narrative: death plucks the groom from bride; the church interior becomes ominous and funereal, accentuated by the photograph's deteriorated look; as the husband journeys to the afterlife, the widow mourns alone. In "Remembrance," Kuhn touches on the shifting

of meanings and memories derived from the family snapshot:

...memories evoked by a photo do not simply spring out of the image itself, but are generated in an intertext of discourses that shift between past and present, spectator and image, and between all these cultural contexts, historical moments. In all this, the image figures largely as a trace, a clue: necessary, but not sufficient, to the activity of meaning-making; always signaling somewhere else. Cultural theory tells us there is little that is really personal or private about either family photographs or the memories they evoke: they can mean only culturally. But the fact that we experience our memories as peculiarly our own sets up a moment of making memory, or memorizing; and indicates that the process of making meaning and making memories are characterized by a certain fluidity. Meanings and memories may change with time, be mutually contradictory, may even be an occasion for or an expression of conflict.9

The new narrative formed by these images “wounds” and evokes meanings that are antithetical to the idealized narrative they create on the level of the studium. The viewer may arrive at these associations as well. In Memoriam provides a context to assist in this double reading - my father’s death certificate and the film loop that reveals the bloodstains on a bedroom carpet being the more blatant clues. The cultural aspect of the family photograph that Kuhn refers to is another access point. Peter Galassi reiterates this idea in his introduction to The Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort exhibition catalog: “...because we all have snapshots of our own, and thus know the habit of understanding them, we are all equipped to imagine ourselves into the snapshots of others, into the dramas and passions they conceal”10

And In Memoriam touches upon that which is concealed - the concept of the family secret: a process in which the family takes

---

the negative events in its history and tucks them away in an effort to erase them. In the installation, a light box, which featured the interior shot of a bedroom, was positioned near the film loop movie screen so they could be viewed together. Out of all the back lit images, the bedroom interior was arguably the only one that came close to looking like a commercial display. The photograph, in fact, is not appropriated, but was shot on location with a medium format camera. The bed sheets, carpeting, curtains, and wallpaper pattern are a tranquil study in pink. The image could easily be an advertisement for home furnishings or bed linen. But the viewer is forced to look at it differently when the film loop, shot in the same location, reveals bloodstains underneath the throw rug beside the bed. The image text, "I felt he was in the room all around and above me," adds additional layers - the room becomes the scene of a crime, a death site, a place of a ghostly visitation. But the loop and bedroom scene are also ambiguous - they offer no information as to what has occurred, leaving room for speculation.

Also found near the movie screen was another light box displaying the photograph of my parents on the couch. In its final form, the handwritten text was changed to read, "It looks like he's sleeping," another common phrase used at a wake. The light box rested on top of an end table that had a newspaper article tucked inside its drawer. The article, which reported on the trial my father never lived to see, was the only reference to the circumstances surrounding his death. His client's sinister threat ("Don't sleep tonight") made to a witness after the trial, became a word play with the text of the wedding image. Since the
newspaper gives no indication of how my father died, the audience is left to further speculate until they encounter his death certificate.

The piece that was, perhaps, most effective in shrouding a secret was a table displaying a row of more back lit family snapshots. An inattentive viewer could easily miss the handwritten suicide note on the illuminated back panel of the center light box. Initially, the note may have created more conjecture on the cause of my father’s death, but its style is vastly different from his actual letters that were incorporated into In Memoriam. There are also references in the note that suggest it was written by a woman. The writer’s lengthy list of all the things she will miss in life, combined with the fact she has not left her signature, transforms the note into a universal, elegiac reflection of anyone faced with his or her death.

**Influences and Historical Context of In Memoriam**

As I began working with the family photographs, letters, and other materials which comprise In Memoriam, the artist Christian Boltanski had a strong impact on me. For some of his installations, he made use of appropriated photographs of groups of school children, zooming in on each individual child’s face and recopying them until the new image was high contrast and out of focus. In some cases, this process gives the faces a skeletal appearance. But they also acquire, as one critic puts it, “a blurred uniformity that emphasizes their common humanity and serves to sever them slightly from ordinary time and space.”[11] It was this concept that inspired me to print many of the photographs

---

in *In Memoriam* out of focus - doing so would help dilute their specificity to my own family and give them a degree of accessibility to the viewer. Other contemporary artists have made use of this technique as well, such as the photographer Bill Jacobson, whose work draws from death in the era of AIDS. His photographs feature extremely blurred black and white portraits of men, the end result being a ghostly memorial. Work dealing with AIDS sometimes shows the hideous effects of the disease to advocate AIDS awareness, safe sex, or a need for more research to find a cure. But Jacobson's comments on his photographs indicate a more universal sensibility of death and loss: "The diffusion of the image implies dispersion of the physical frame, the bodily shell...My photos usually trigger an emotional response. I believe their faded quality is a reflection of how the mind works - struggling to hold onto memories as they dim."  

Boltanski's work also deals with the death of memory. In a piece called *Monument*, he made use of his own class group portrait, taken when he was seven years old. He incorporated the children's faces into huge, wall mounted shrines which were composed of small, tin framed, monochromatic, photographs of gray, red, and gold. As Boltanski has said about the childhood photograph:

...I don't remember any of their names, I don't remember anything more than the faces on the photograph. It could be said that they disappeared from my memory, that this period of time was dead. Because now these children must be adults, about whom I know nothing.

Boltanski also surrounded the children's faces with small light bulbs that took on the aura of votive candles. The elaborately

---

13Gumbert, p. 83.
draped electrical cords of the bulbs, however, add a degree of menace to his installations. *In Memoriam* followed in a similar vein, using dangling light bulbs to transform photographs and other objects into shrines while, simultaneously, creating the sense that these items were being interrogated.

Another work connected to *In Memoriam*—most notably in terms of its presentation—could be found in The *Interrupted Life*, an extensive exhibition of artists dealing with death organized by the New Museum of Contemporary Art. The piece was entitled *Mercy*, created by the artist David Moffett. His installation consisted of a 100 light boxes illuminating yellow roses, each representing 1,000 people who had died of AIDS—a powerful commemoration that shares the universal sensibilities of Jacobson’s work.

Aside from its obvious connection to death, *In Memoriam* is about the representation of the family. A 1991 exhibition that tackled this subject on a considerable scale was “The Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort.” The show, which featured the work of 62 photographers, was panned by some critics for being too apolitical and for using its theme loosely enough to include practically anyone. As a result, the exhibition revealed its “connoisseurist impulses”—as one critic noted: “...these shimmering, oversized prints and cibachromes clearly weren’t the ‘intimate’ images suggested by Galassi’s essay and one would hardly think of Lee Friedlander and Cindy Sherman as domestic ‘insiders.’”14 In spite of the criticism of Galassi’s curatorial thesis, certain artists stood out for me. William Eggleston’s photographs of domestic interiors create somber connections. A

---

dining room table set for a meal for one speaks of loneliness; an ordinary gas oven with its door open becomes a contemplation of suicide; the space underneath a bed becomes a repository of decay. The snapshot style of these color photographs is a thin veil over dark secrets. Larry Sultan, another artist in the exhibition, uses appropriated home movie stills from his own family to reexamine the American dream - to question its "values and payoffs." Sultan himself admits to being seduced by the movies and snapshots - its as if his family, as he puts it: "projected its hopes and fantasies onto film emulsion."15 His home movie stills possess an ethereality very similar to the shots of my father on his honeymoon. The 1991 group exhibition "Reframing the Family" at New York City's Artists' Space made up for "Pleasures and Terrors" apoliticalness by taking on specific issues and controversial topics such as domestic violence, new reproductive technologies, and alternate views of the family beyond the heterosexual paradigm. In Memoriam, however, does not possess this level of specificity - it is a wider reflection. Snapshots are the family's way of presenting an idealized image of itself that does not exist. But although the images of In Memoriam are undermined by their new context, I do not regard the main thrust of the show as solely a postmodern deconstruction of my family's photographs. To say the Ozzie and Harriet myth of the family does not exist is no revelation. In Memoriam deals with the shifting meanings of photographs, but this concept is intertwined with other elements; a ghost story; a mystery; a journey of the soul into the afterlife; faded memories; buried secrets; a memorial.

Closing

When my mother came across the wedding proofs, she also found a copy of a letter my father - then only 24 - had written to the Pope in 1966, the year before I was born. He had sent it to protest the abolition of the Latin Mass as decreed by Vatican II. With the Latin oration gone, the Mass, for him, had lost its ritual and mysticism. Although he was still in law school, he was quoting liturgical constitutions and past papal encyclicals to support his points as if he were already a lawyer preparing to argue before a judge. He had always remained a practicing Catholic, but he held steadfast to his convictions about the Latin Mass all his life. I converted his three page letter into a triptych of light boxes, placing each page into an ornate gold frame to give them the same reverence as an ancient, sacred text. To make this shrine more magical, stereo speakers playing Gregorian chant were hidden inside.

Another letter I had never seen before, that was also incorporated into In Memoriam, was again written in 1966. He had sent it to the landlord of my parent's first apartment to complain about the dilapidated condition of their bathroom. My father, who was constantly expanding his vocabulary, enjoyed using impressive wording whenever he could. I could almost picture him at his typewriter with a smile on his face as he referred to the problems with the plumbing as a "pluvian deluge" and demanded the immediate "amelioration" of the situation. But his mistyping of the word "odor" so it phonetically sounded like 'order' is equally

16 He had typed "ordor" instead.
amusing - order, after all, was exactly what he was seeking.

Placed in a shadowbox along side his death certificate in the exhibition was a letter my father sent to me several months before he died. Despite its brevity, it reflects how little he had changed in almost 30 years. In the space of three sentences, he managed to make two typos and use the word "apoplexy" in jesting reference to my mother, while signing the letter as Pater - Latin for father.

When I looked at old photographs of my father, the distance in time created in me a certain level of detachment, unlike Roland Barthes, who found the essence of his mother in a single photograph taken of her years ago. Seeing the kindness in her childhood face was a punctum that only he could experience, so for him, reproducing the photograph in Camera Lucida was pointless. Similarly, I did not use recent photographs of my father for In Memoriam. They showed a man much younger looking than 52 - it was too difficult for me to get beyond the sense of tragedy and loss. I could not reinterpret or deconstruct them. They wound at a level only I can experience.

Camera Lucida was Barthes' final book before he died in 1980. His previous complex and esoteric writings would later be absorbed into postmodern theory. Although his last work still possessed these academic qualities, his recollections of his mother instilled a personal and sentimental element that was unlike his earlier texts. The second half of Camera Lucida is, in a certain sense, Barthes' memorial to his mother. Likewise, In Memoriam is my memorial to my father. His letters are a reflection of the facets of his personality that I most admired. They show a man of
erudition, humor, and staunch convictions. But they are also symbolic of his fallibility.

In closing, there is one photograph from In Memoriam I must mention because of what it evokes in my mind. Initially it may seem an odd choice, since there is no one in the image. It is another ethereal honeymoon shot that shows a car parked in front of a white mansion. There are a myriad of narratives it could convey. But I recall the day I followed my father to the on-ramp for the highway, hours before he died. When I came across this photograph after his death, I envisioned that his journey ended at this celestial dwelling after we parted ways. Now the son must travel the highway on his own.
Appendix A

My Father's Letters
To His Holiness Pope Paul VI
The Vatican
Rome, Italy

Most Holy Father:

In the United States today, there exists a situation which is a matter of concern to many Catholics: the declension of the Gregorian liturgy in the Church. The liturgy which served the Church so well for almost thirteen centuries has been allowed to atrophy. The ceremony initiated by our beloved Gregory has been relegated into a ceremony which is quasi-Protestant accompanied by cacophonous music.

If we assert that religion is an intellectual and not an emotional act, then our liturgy must be conducive of invoking a contemplative atmosphere. The present liturgy is remiss in this respect. Admittedly, our emotions play a role in our worship of God. In activating our emotions in acts of devotion, I can think of no music more inspirational than the soft intonations of a Gregorian Chant. Article 114 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy states that "the treasure of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with very great care." However, this is not the
situation. The only hymns which are sung by the congregation or choir are those in English, to the complete exclusion of Gregorian Chant. This certainly is not in accordance with the pronouncement of Article 114.

The deficiencies engendered by the liturgical reforms are best illustrated in the celebration of a High Mass. This ceremony, once the epitome of the most sublime act of religion, the Mass, is now one lacking unity and tenor. The Gloria in English sounds like a dirge. The Credo and Pater Noster are also appalling.

If I read the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy properly, especially Article 36, it appears that it was not the intent of the Fathers of the Church to summarily abolish the Latin Mass. The vernacular was to be utilized where the local ecclesiastical authorities felt it was necessary.

I believe His Holiness Pope Pius XII in his encyclical "Mediator Dei" best expressed the true concept of participation at Mass: "They are to be praised who with the idea of getting the Christian people to take part more easily and more fruitfully in the Mass, strive to make them familiar
His Holiness Pope Paul VI

July 21, 1966

with the 'Roman Missal' so that the faithful, united with the Priest, may pray together in the very words and sentiments of the Church "

Even the most blatant critics of the previous liturgy would concede that it never was a source of great dissatisfaction or conflict in the Church.

The previous liturgy engendered harmony not disruption.

I therefore propose to Your Holiness that the following be considered: that Your Holiness issue a decree stating that all High Masses be celebrated in the manner that they were previous to Vatican II; that on holy days of obligation at least two Masses be said in Latin in the manner that they were previous to Vatican II.

I hope that Your Holiness, in your wisdom, will give consideration to these proposals.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Leo J. Dailey
Avalon Management Corp.
P.O. Box 308
Lenox Hill Station
New York, New York, 10021

Gentlemen:

I wish to make known to you the existence of an intolerable situation which I believe you have a duty to ameliorate. As a result of the recent difficulties with the plumbing, the ceiling and a wall of the bathroom has cracked and buckled. A reoccurrence of the condition which caused this pluvian deluge, or even the vibration which is attendant with a large truck passing would cause a shower of plaster to descend upon whoever was in the bathroom at the time.

Also incident to the above matter, there is a most obnoxious order which permeates the air and even our clothing. At times, this order which seems to be a combination of rusty water, moist plaster and what have you, is enough to make you nauseous.

I am sure that you will give your prompt attention to the amelioration of this condition.

Very truly yours,

Leo J. Dailey
January 17, 1994

Christian:

Before your mother develops apoplexy would you please do the paper that you have to do. If it's not due until February you have plenty of time to do it. If you need it typed you can Federal Express here to the office and I can get it typed for you and sent back Federal Express.

Your Pater
Appendix B

Newspaper Article and Death Certificate
A Coventry father and son have been convicted of defrauding the Coventry Credit Union in obtaining a loan. U.S. Attorney Sheldon Whitehouse said the men conspired with a closing attorney to inflate the sale price of an 80-acre parcel and netted $85,000 more than they needed to buy the property.

James Frazza, 52, and Scott Frazza, 26, were convicted Monday after a federal jury trial and an investigation by the FBI's Providence office. The jury convicted the men of conspiracy to defraud the credit union, making false statements, bank fraud and mail fraud.

The Frazzas told the credit union they wanted to buy property worth $205,000, when the actual sale price was only $120,000.

With the help of Leo Dailey, the closing attorney, they drew up two closing statements.

The first, showing a sale price of $120,000, was signed by the seller but was never given to the credit union.

The second, false statement, with a sale price of $205,000, was given to the credit union. The false price was hidden from the seller. Dailey, who also had been charged with wrongdoing, died before the trial.

After a hearing Wednesday, James Frazza was placed under house arrest pending sentencing. Whitehouse said he threatened a witness after the trial by calling him and warning him, "Don't sleep tonight."

No date has been set for the sentencing, said the prosecutor, assistant U.S. Attorney IRA Belkin. The Frazzas face up to 50 years in prison, $2.5 million in fines and up to three years of supervised probation.

DEPCO DIRECTOR John F. McJennett III disclosed sale of Marquette Plaza yesterday.

DEPCO said it was forced to accept $675,000 despite extensive marketing. A sealed-bid auction last spring attracted five bidders, but no deal was consummated.

The sale was handled by AMRES, the company hired by DEPCO to liquidate assets taken over during the crisis.

Marquette's downfall came after the credit union losted its ties to the French-Canadian community in the 1960s and plunged.

"It's not a white elephant, it's a red elephant," Governor Sundin

OIL PRICES HIGHER: Crude oil prices gained slightly in thin pre-Labor Day trading yesterday after a Nigerian oil minister said the nine-week oil workers strike in his country had cut crude exports by about 29 percent. Light sweet crude for delivery in October closed at $17.52 per barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange, up 5 cents from Thursday and up 38 cents for the week.
I hereby certify that this is a true and exact copy of the document officially registered and placed on file in the issuing office.

Issuing Office Town of Coventry Date of Issuance July 20, 1994

Signature of Registrar Boleria Johnson, CMC (CQK)

THIS COPY VALID ONLY IF ISSUED ON PAPER WITH ENGRAVED BORDER DISPLAYING RAISED SEAL AND SIGNATURE OF STATE OR LOCAL REGISTRAR.