

PHOTOGRAPHY AS FAILED PROSTHETIC SELF-CREATION IN THE WRITING OF DIONNE BRAND

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Don't put me in a frame upon the mantel
where memories grow dusty old and gray
"Twilight," The Band (Robertson)

The production and/or consumption of visual representations, be they paintings, videos, photographs, or other visual media, is a common, though largely undiscussed, theme in Dionne Brand's work.¹ Since the time of her earliest published writing, Brand's characters have often found themselves negotiating their roles as image-consumers, -participants, and/or -makers. Whether in *'Fore Day Morning's* small plea "can you paint me now?" (22), *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun's* reference to "classified photographs" of "american warships" (9), or even *Inventory's* attention to the "window / of the television" (28), visual representations of the world become a frequent preoccupation. In Brand's fictional constructs, as in our everyday realities, to be in the world is to confront images and often to find oneself within them.

While much could be said about her representation of various visual media, this paper takes as its focus Brand's references to photographs and the practice of photography. In Brand's texts, photographs become the material markers of an inhabited past, thereby functioning within a context of possessing memory and ancestry. I use the term *possession* purposefully here to suggest that through possessing the material object of a photograph,

Brand's characters seek, though they do not always find, a means of preserving and thus gaining control over and owning their ancestral heritage. As such, photographs in Brand's texts are held up to offer a prosthetic connection with that which has been and those who are now absent. However, corresponding with Marlene Goldman's observation that Brand's texts express an ambivalence regarding one's relationship to origins, photographs in Brand's writing are ultimately revealed to be the makers of false promises. Although they offer themselves up as prostheses filling in for that which is felt lacking—one's memory, one's ancestral past, one's absent relatives—photographs cannot in the end offer the characters the sense of wholeness that they desire. In fact, photographs are revealed to be a fallible archive, unproductive if not in fact destructive in the characters' attempts to suture themselves to their ancestry.²

Photographs in Brand's texts are significant precisely because they are fickle signifiers, promising that which they cannot deliver. Photographs may ultimately fail, but the seductive nature of what they promise has long been acknowledged. Although photographs are as mediated by cultural values as any other discourse, they still tend to gain their power and affect through their high modality, hence mimetic potential. As Susan Sontag suggests, "a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint" (154). A photograph thus attests to "*what has been*" (Barthes 85; italics in original), many thereby investing it with iconic resonance, an ability to manifest an otherwise absent referent. This ability, as Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas forward, "offers the experience of a personal encounter through such iconic presence . . . Far more so than words, images are still perceived to have a power and an agency to bring to life" (10). In other words, photography's form of mimesis functions to make it "superior to everything the human mind can or can have conceived [sic] to assure us of reality" (Barthes 87). Photography can thereby become invested with the ability and purpose to prosthetically connect individuals to that reality. Photography promises "to overcome . . . distance—to reduce, that is, the distance between people and

events, or people and places” (Cadava xxiv); that which is in the past is brought forward into the present and that which is absent is rendered present.

A belief in the iconicity of photographs, thus, often incites an emotional investment that fashions them to be a mode of prosthetic memory. In coining this term, Alison Landsberg intends “prosthetic memory” to signify the incorporation into self of a “deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live” (2). In Landsberg’s conception, prosthetic memories are formed through “experiential site[s] such as a movie theatre or museum” (2), environments where one’s experiences are multi-sensory. Photographs, as objects to see, hold, and perhaps even smell, can be said to have a similar capacity for motivating such prosthetic connections. While Landsberg fashions prosthetic memories to have the primary purpose of constructing a “new form” (2) of public memory where an individual can incorporate world events and traumas into his or her own psyche, in Brand’s texts prosthetic memories more importantly serve to connect an individual with his or her familial heritage. In this way, Brand’s treatment of photographs as a means of creating prosthetic connections to people and events across time is akin to Marianne Hirsch’s positioning of photographs as the means through which one experiences the state of “postmemory.” Postmemory, as conceived by Hirsch, “is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection” (22). In other words, postmemory is a form of prosthetic connection to the past experienced particularly by “those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth” (22). As Hirsch argues, photographs are a key means through which these narratives are constructed; she writes, “in their enduring ‘umbilical’ connection to life [photographs] are precisely the medium connecting first- and second-generation remembrance, memory and postmemory” (23).

Although Hirsch’s postmemory is a concept quite appropriate to elucidate the experiences of Brand’s characters, particularly in that it foregrounds the importance of photographs, Landsberg’s terminology is more compelling. The term *postmemory* suggests a basis in time—one’s experience of and connection to one’s ancestral past is figured merely as coming *after* the initial

formation of the past event as memory. The term does little to capture the process by which later generations actually take on or respond to the memories of those who have preceded them. Although Hirsch does identify “imaginative investment and creation” (22) to be the means through which postmemory develops, the term itself does not represent that process. In that, as a trope, prosthesis can “[p]oint to an addition, a replacement, and also an extension, and augmentation, and an enhancement” (Smith and Morra 2), prosthesis not only captures the variety of purposes of prosthetic memory, but also suggests its provisional nature. As Landsberg suggests, a prosthetic memory is something that is “worn” (20); by extension, that means that it can also be taken off (though, as Brand’s characters, particularly in *What We All Long For*, convey, this taking off of prosthetic memories often proves difficult, if not impossible). Hirsch’s term *postmemory* seems to imply that those who are inundated by the memories of prior generations innately must live in a state of postmemory, with no possible escape. The trope of prosthesis, in contrast, allows for more agency in one’s confrontation of the past. A prosthetic memory may be put on, but it may also be modified, discarded, and/or exchanged with another. As such, the individual confronting the past experiences of others can remain at least somewhat in control of how he or she puts to use those memories in his or her own life.

As Brand’s texts show, since photographs can serve as prostheses and thereby “give people an imaginary possession of a past” (Sontag 9), they can function in the context of offering individuals a firmer sense of self as rooted in a continuum of family. Nevertheless, while this use of photographs as a means of suturing oneself to the past is on one level rendered as desirable in Brand’s texts, this desire tends to become ambivalent, its fulfilment not necessarily a positive occurrence. Despite this ambivalence, Brand’s characters, often struggling with a compromised sense of ancestry, frequently depict photographs as a means of positioning themselves within a heritage they otherwise perceive themselves to be lacking. Consequently, a lack of photographs can be an inciting cause of anxiety about the possible disintegration of family and heritage. To have photographs is, in this view, to have family.

For example, in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, one might note that Cordelia's ability to imagine a future for herself and her family is utterly dependent upon her inclusion of photographs in her vision. She "imagine[s] one day a piano in her living room with a photograph atop it . . . other photographs of her children in different stages of their childhood, in their best clothes, their hair greased back like hers. Their confirmation with prayer books in their hands. Their graduations, their marriages" (108-109). If she can envision the existence of these photographs, then she can feel more confident in the existence of that future. Similarly, both Marie Ursule and Eula imply that their lack of photographs indicates the impossibility of a longed for "single line of ancestry . . . One line . . . that [Eula] can trace" (246) (this longing is, of course, revealed to be filled with contradictions in the broader narrative). The earliest mention of photographs in *At the Full and Change of the Moon* in fact takes place in the context of the comparison of Marie Ursule's legacy with that of de Lambert, her owner and soon-to-be murderer. De Lambert and his family are pictured in "photographs that would speak of a great family. De Lambert. De Lambert spread across their mantelpieces in the faces of great-grandmother, grandfather, uncle and great-grand-aunt, little boy, young man in regimental wear in medals from the Boer expedition and the First World War" (19). Though the images are often of non-desirable relatives—"soaked in rum fishermen, . . . uncles who had fingered young girls' dresses" (19)—the presence of the photographs suggest that this is a family strong enough to persist. That this mantelpiece has been rebuilt after a fire and is still now populated by the family photos even further emphasizes the endurance of this family's "single line of ancestry" (246). Furthermore, the images embody the proliferation of the family—there are "more faces now added to the ones in photographs on the mantelpiece" (19)—thereby implying that the family will continue on into the future with little threat of disintegration.

Beyond emphasizing a seemingly endless perpetuation of this family, the material conditions of the photographs also highlight an important ability to contain the family in one singular space. The mantelpiece as the site of the photographic display becomes a space in which the family's constancy and

unity across generations can be implied. Marie Ursule and her ancestors, who are not mentioned as being represented in photographs, are, by contrast, a fragmented family, with “lives that would *spill* all over floors and glass cases and the verandas and the streets of the new world coming” (20; emphasis added). They and their sense of ancestry cannot be contained or unified on top a mantelpiece because they will, in Marie Ursule’s vision, become a dispersed family of the diaspora. Eula, Marie Ursule’s great-granddaughter, will similarly lament their lack of photographs and familial space over a century later. A place she stayed when she was young “had a piano with pictures of their whole family on the top . . . [,] all [standing] on the lace cloth” (239). Eula, in Toronto and for the most part estranged from her family, is instead left only with an awareness that she cannot find her mother’s likeness anywhere. She offers no mention of possessing photographs as mementoes and in Toronto, “no one there looked like [her mother]” (246). A lack of photographic representation of the family coupled with an inability to seek out her mother even vicariously, by recognizing her in another, renders Eula’s isolation from family complete. Her longing for a space that could contain and thereby unify her family remains unfulfilled.

In Brand’s short story “Photograph,” photographs are similarly held up to offer a prosthetic connection to the person represented. Amidst a host of children left by their emigrant parents to be raised at least temporarily by the grandmother, photographs become what Sontag deems the “token presence of the dispersed relatives” (9). Here, the photographs of the children’s mothers become stand-ins, serving to keep the mothers in their children’s lives. Although what they glean from the photos of the mothers is rather superficial—the mothers’ prettiness—these images provide the children with confirmation that their mothers still exist though they are “[a]way-away” (788).³ By extension, the story’s key tension—that there is no photograph of the grandmother other than the one on her identification card—revolves around this similar assumption that to possess an image is to possess the individual represented. The children who are raised by the grandmother are shown to be constantly seeking an even closer connection with her, most often through material

items, the grandmother's "sacred things" (788). The grandmother's identification photograph, taken to enable her to vote regarding national independence, becomes part of this pursuit of connection that in the chaos of daily family life is compromised. Despite the identification photo not representing the grandmother effectively—"[i]t is grey and pained" (791), while the grandmother "was round and comfortable" (791)—this photograph is still revealed to be a much desired object: it is "all wrinkled and chewed up, even after [the] grandmother hid it from us and warned us not to touch it . . . The laminate was now dull and my grandmother's picture was grey and creased" (789). These material traces suggest an image much coveted, used by the grandchildren in their seemingly constant attempt to possess her as their own and solidify their place with her. Much as their own "birth certificates, their musty smell and yellowing water-marked coarse paper was proof that [their] grandmother owned [them]" (789), the photograph becomes the object through which the permanency of their connection to her is confirmed.

As becomes apparent in *What We All Long For*, the ability of photographs to grant the viewer a prosthetic connection to those represented gains new meaning when the photograph demands the confrontation of a traumatic past. In this novel, Tuyen's connection to her brother Quy is forged solely through her encounter with photographs. Quy, having been lost as a five-year-old as the family fled Vietnam, fills Tuyen's visual landscape throughout her childhood. The image of this brother lost long before her birth "had looked at [Tuyen] from every mantel, every surface" (267). Used in the parents' search for Quy, his photograph "littered the house" (225). In this way, her brother's photographic image is experienced by Tuyen not so much as an object of prosthetic connection but as an object of haunting; it manifests Quy—in his unchanging boyhood gaze—as a spectre that pervades Tuyen's family home. Many have theorized the photograph in terms of just such a spectrality; the photograph is "*memento mori*" to Sontag (15), "the corpse" of "deceased experience" to Walter Benjamin ("Central" 49), and "the return of the dead" to Roland Barthes (9). In fact, to Barthes, the importance of the photograph is that "it certifies, so to speak, that the corpse is alive, as *corpse*" (78-79); in

other words, unlike the literal ghost figure, which suggests a coming back to life of the dead, the photograph brings the dead to the present without the promise of reanimation or redemption. As such, the dead remain dead, and the living unable to correct or atone for the past. While other members of the family may invest Quy's image with the purpose of keeping him vicariously a part of their present, in Tuyen's interpretation, his image functions more to keep the family rooted in the event of having lost him. They remain caught "in that particular tableau" (Brand, *What We All Long For* 268). Confronted by the perpetual innocence of the child represented in the photo and the freezing of Quy's development so that to them he will only ever be a child, the family must constantly confront their failure of that "small, intelligent-looking boy" (225).

For Tuyen, then, the image of Quy represents not so much a means of prosthetically connecting to her lost brother, but rather a means of prosthetically connecting with the family that existed before their inconceivable loss. Her contemplation of two paired family photographs reveals this attempt to better understand a loss that she does not feel. Though she can appreciate her family's pain and acknowledge the absence of Quy, how can she experience this absence as loss when to her Quy has only ever been an image, and that image has been a constant presence? In looking to these two family portraits, Tuyen can come to understand her position as a mere secondary witness to this family trauma. The first family portrait, taken by her father, pictures a time "before Quy was born . . . He was the small rise under her mother's red dress" (222). The second portrait is "[i]dential except for her father's presence. And identical except that their features were now tense, the two girls grim. The rise in her mother's dress was no longer there, and the boy whom it represented was also missing" (223). In pairing these two photographs, Tuyen seeks to chart the development of her family, hoping to understand the loss that irrecoverably altered their relationships to one another.⁴ In her approach to the first portrait, Tuyen partakes in the kind of "imaginative investment and creation" that Hirsch associates with the construction of postmemory (Hirsch 22). In thinking about the photograph, Tuyen must acknowledge that

she has no basis for conceiving of the dress in the first picture as red: “The photograph was black and white. She had not asked her mother the colour. She must have assumed, she thought now, from the darkish hue and the luminous face. It could just as well have been blue, but Tuyen liked to think of it as red, bursting with life” (Brand, *What We All Long For* 222). In envisioning the colour of the mother’s dress, seemingly without really knowing that she has done so, Tuyen demonstrates an ability to imaginatively enter the space of the photograph as if she too had inhabited its scene.

No such ability is demonstrated in her approach to the second photograph. Instead her descriptions of it are based solely on what she sees in the photograph rather than on an imaginative expansion of its details; her description focusses on the tense features, the grim girls, the father’s presence, the absent rise in the mother’s dress. In that Quy’s loss is the symbolic value of the photograph, it becomes important that this photograph does not motivate a prosthetic entering into the past for Tuyen. The distance that she has always felt from her family as a result of their grief over Quy, a grief that she does not feel, is figured by her different reactions to the two photographs: she can enter a photograph that represents Quy’s coming presence, but not imaginatively inhabit one that represents his loss. As such, just as the loss of Quy has rendered Tuyen an outsider to her family, his loss also results in her inability to acquire a prosthetic connection through the latter portrait. She cannot experience his loss in part because she cannot experience his presence, the family photos exclusively representing moments before Quy’s birth and after his loss. What remains entirely inaccessible to Tuyen is a sense of her family as they were in the presence of Quy. She therefore remains cut off from their trauma, the existing photographs offering her little means of access.

Although Landsberg figures a prosthetic connection to the past as a realizable goal, and Hirsch, too, suggests that the experience of postmemory is inevitable, Brand’s treatment of photographs reveals that a prosthetic connection is frequently an unfulfilled and/or fickle goal. Photographs do not, for instance, inherently guarantee the preservation of the past. The de Lamberts of *At the Full and Change of the Moon* may have a photographic record of

their generations, but “[g]enerations needing a new language . . . would even forget de Lambert, the man in their faces and in the faces of the photographs that would speak of a great family” (19). His image becomes a signifier irrecoverably alienated from its referent; one can know the image and maybe even the name, but not the being. By extension, although the de Lambert’s photographs seem to achieve a certain sense of permanence, photographs as material objects are not generally rendered in Brand’s work as perpetually enduring. Instead, their decay is frequently the focus: Alan’s photo in *thirsty* is “finger-worn” (9); the laminate of the grandmother’s photograph in “Photograph” is “now dull” (789), the image itself “creased” (789). While photographs are valued as a means to enable access to the past, the materiality of photographs suggests that as an enduring archive, photographs too might fail.

Even if photographs are preserved, they are often revealed to be insufficient representations. The biggest failure of the grandmother’s identity card photograph in “Photograph,” for instance, is its failure to capture the grandmother within her relationship with the grandchildren. Although somewhat outside the scope of this current paper, the idea that this much-coveted photograph exists because of a call to political agency, the grandmother’s participation in the vote for independence, bears noting. The simultaneous desire for this photograph, yet admission of its insufficiency, functions within the context of the photograph marking the grandmother’s political citizenship. Although not addressed specifically in the story, the grandchildren’s desire for the photograph symbolically suggests a validation of the grandmother’s choice to assert her status as citizen. Conversely, their dissatisfaction with the photograph suggests a realization that the nation and its systems have produced this image, and consequently, that the image and the identity it gives the grandmother cannot possibly represent her sufficiently. It takes her outside of the context of her family and what she means to them. The image offers “no finger stroking the air in reprimand, no arm under her chin at the front window or crossed over her breasts waiting for us” (800).

Although one might assume that these failures of photographs to fulfill their purpose as prostheses is to be lamented, in Brand’s texts the preservation

of origins and ancestral connections is often revealed to be destructive. In Brand's work, the problem posed by photographs is in part due to their suggestion of stasis; they "*frame, freeze and fix*" (Lury 3; italics in original). For a writer like Brand who advocates "drift" (*Map*) or "skim" (*thirsty*) as appropriate modes of belonging in contemporary culture, the static nature of the photographic image, and its subsequent promise of rooting one to the past, is deemed threatening.⁵ By "drift," Brand is referring in part to the compromised sense of belonging experienced by diasporic groups. She states that peoples of the diaspora "have no such immediate sense of belonging, only of drift" (*Map* 118). As Goldman elaborates, Brand's sense of drift also reflects a scepticism regarding the desire for origins: "At every turn, Brand's fictions express a longing for and, ultimately, a rejection of origins, belonging, and possession, including the potentially beneficial forms of origin, belonging, and possession associated with being part of a family and, by extension, a community" (24). Brand's treatment of photographs is a manifestation of this contradictory wish for, yet rejection of, stable connections to the past and/or to family. Photographs can confirm the existence of the past and offer a means of access, but only in fallible and potentially damaging ways.

In "Photograph," for example, the photographic images offer the false promise of a happy mother "smiling to us astride a bicycle" (796) when what greets the children is an angry and abusive mother. Photographs in this story also offer a so-called lasting representation of self that does not, in fact, promise to be representative: "Nobody knows that it's me in the photograph" (791). Interestingly, though the narrator can acknowledge the existence of this photograph of herself and her sisters, she notes, "There's a photograph of Genevieve and me and two of my sisters someplace. We took it to send to England" (790). In the end, the photograph itself is not cast as a lasting or effective archive. While the photograph is merely in some unknown place, what remains accessible to the narrator is the memory of having had the picture taken. She elaborately explains,

My grandmother dressed us up, put my big sister in charge of us, giving her 50 cents tied up in a handkerchief and pinned to the waistband of her

dress, and warned us not to give her any trouble. We marched to Wong's Studio on the Coffee, the main road in our town, and fidgeted as Mr Wong fixed us in front of a promenade scene to take our picture. My little sister cried through it all and sucked her fingers. (790-791)

In other words, as represented by Brand in this story, memory—in all of its fluidity and possible fallibility, its drift—still trumps a photograph as an effective representation of what has passed.

In *What We All Long For*, however, photographs are shown to have a greater, and more destructive, hold over the characters, particularly over Tuyen and Quy. Tuyen's persistent confrontation of the image of her lost brother has had the negative effect of compromising her ability to relate to her world in any way other than through photographs and the act of photography. Celia Lury has suggested that "the photograph, more than merely representing, has taught us a way of seeing (Ihde, 1995), and . . . this way of seeing has transformed contemporary self-understandings" (3). Although for Lury "seeing photographically" has more to do with photography motivating our need to experience ourselves primarily as images, and thus as objects, photography also can be said to impact our memory and narrativization of our own experiences.⁶ As such, Landsberg's view of prosthetic memory can be expanded to include more than just the incorporation of someone else's memories into one's psyche. Prosthesis as a trope, in fact, also allows a situation in which one is not putting on the memories of others but is in fact coming to understand one's own experiences as mediated by photographic representation. One's own memories after all are often "put on" or "worn" rather than just naturally or biologically inhabited. As Lury suggests, one "may"—though I'd say "must"—grow "dissociated from his or her biography—consciousness and memories" (85); nevertheless, photographs as a form of "self-extension" (3) function to produce "a *prosthetic auto/biography* or biographies" (85; italics in original) whether one's memory of the represented event is still largely intact or not. The taking of a photograph confers status on a moment, rendering it preservable, but nevertheless subject to renarrativization. Since the photograph may disclose something other than what is remembered, the

photograph becomes a prosthetic form of memory, irreparably mediating one's sense of self and one's past.

For Tuyen, the pervasiveness of Quy's image in her youth results in a situation where she struggles to relate to her surroundings except through a camera lens. Her narratives of self and what she experiences are, thus, almost exclusively formed via the images her camera catches. In the midst of a riot, she can experience the fragmented "arc of a tear-gas canister, broken glass, and police shoes" (206) through her camera, but misses the calls of Oku crying for help as he is arrested; in the midst of the World Cup, she can "attend every street party" (204), but only with her camera in tow. This "way of seeing" reflects Tuyen's need to stop the movement of her life through the taking of photographs, a need attributed largely to her family's loss of Quy. This desire for stasis is, for Tuyen, the only way to ensure that she can see "what wasn't being seen" (206). She seeks the unseen because "her brother must have been unseen, . . . her mother noticing too late" (206). Therefore, Tuyen's reliance on her camera is a product of an inherited guilt regarding the fallibility of sight. Echoing Benjamin's depiction of photography as manifesting "unconscious optics" ("Work" 237), Tuyen treats photography as a medium that allows her access to what the eye may take in but the brain cannot fully process and/or recall.

Although Tuyen's tendency to relate to her surroundings through the lens of a camera colours many of her relationships, we in particular witness the effect of her constant confrontation of Quy's image when Tuyen at last encounters the now-grown Quy (or at least someone who seems to be Quy). She cannot trust her own eyes to discern the identity of the man she sees, needing instead to take his picture and more importantly to develop the film and print the image so that she can "suss out" the "intimate fact that she seemed to know but could not put her finger on" (208). This need to encounter Quy through an imaged double is perhaps not surprising since, to Tuyen, Quy was only ever an image: "she had never ever seen his real face" (267). Consequently, to Tuyen, the "real" Quy is in fact his photographic image. As such, whereas Hirsch classes the photograph as a "ghostly revenant" (20) of

the referent, in this case, the live Quy becomes the doppelgänger-like manifestation of his photograph. In his living form, not in his image, he becomes to Tuyen the “shadow” (Brand, *What We All Long For* 299), the “ghost” (301), the “apparition” (302).

Furthermore, Brand makes it questionable whether Quy will ever be more than an image or able to escape the stasis in which his photograph has held him in the minds of his family. In that his adult face appears to be the same “intelligent-looking boy[’s]” (227) face that haunted Tuyen’s childhood, Quy’s very physicality suggests his being frozen in a perpetual youth. Brand may end the story before Quy is able to reunite with his parents and older siblings who had experienced his loss first-hand (whether Quy will even survive his beating is left in doubt), but the suggestion remains that the family’s prosthetic connection to the image of Quy as a child will be a difficult one to overcome. The mother, for instance, had for many years during her search for Quy insisted that “[h]e will not be much changed” (117) from his five-year-old pictured self. To her, he remains the child in the photograph; he has not matured because she has not been there to perceive it.

Furthermore, just as Quy’s family experiences him as a photograph, so too does Quy experience himself. This sense of self as image is inescapable for Quy because from childhood, he recognizes the role that being photographed—that being an image—can play in his desire to be recovered by his family. He “ran to be photographed each time some news reporter or refugee official arrived” (9), hoping that he would be recognized from his photograph and thereby found. This positioning of himself as an image in the end results in Quy’s compromised ability to function as anything more than an image. Photographs are meant to be a reflection of the real, and yet conversely, they reveal that Quy has various identities. Quy is consequently left with little sense of who he is as the referent for those images. In a photograph he can seem like a third son to a stranger’s family (9); in a photograph, he can also be without identity at all. As he acknowledges, refugees all “look as one face—no particular personal aspect, no individual ambition . . . Was it us or was it the photographer who couldn’t make distinctions among people he

didn't know?" (8-9). Left with little surety of identity, Quy experiences himself largely as the image captured, not the self being photographed. Note, for instance, his description of the experience of approaching Bidong, where he mistakenly believes he will reunite with his family: "Sometimes I wish that I had stayed right there in that *picture* in that dawn. I see me leaning off the *Dong Khoi* with the beautiful island in front of me and that feeling of expectation. Right then, nothing is wrong. Nothing" (138; emphasis added). Although in this case, no actual photograph exists of Quy onboard the ship, Quy's experience of self is primarily that of an object being viewed. This seeing of himself photographically persists in his self-formation, reaching its culmination when in his potential death, he is again described as "lean[ing] his head as he had over the side of the boat, longingly" (318). Because the third-person narrator seemingly positions Quy back in that initial "picture" of self, one is left with circularity in the narrative that suggests that Quy has not succeeded in being anything more than an image.

Similarly, Tuyen's final vision for her installation project intimates that even in the recovery of the man believed to be her lost brother, all that has really been found of Quy is an updated image, not a living, breathing person. Tuyen intends to "make tiny copies of the image, yes, and insert them among the records of longing in her installation" (308). Her conceptualization thereby situates Quy's adult image in the context of continued longing. Perhaps even more importantly, her choice to make many copies of his image echoes her family's earlier method for finding Quy. Just as Quy's childhood image had "littered" (225) the house during the search, Tuyen's plan too suggests a proliferation of his picture, initiating an updated form of littering. Tuyen's use of Quy's adult photo thus suggests he is still longed for, not found, although the living Quy may indeed walk among them. All told, Quy's image may be capturable but the image's referent remains still absent and unknown. Quy has not yet escaped being a mere image to his family and Tuyen has not yet escaped her family's—and her own—perpetual search for the lost boy.

As the preceding discussion has suggested, Dionne Brand's treatment of photography suggests that photographs cannot fulfill their promises. They may

offer a certain confirmation of the existence of the past and provide a means through which one can gain prosthetic connection to what has gone before. Nevertheless, as conceived in Brand's writing, photographs remain a fallible archive, ripe with misrepresentations and a troubling stasis of representation. As Susan Laxton observes, "we *know* that the photograph is a construction but we persist in *believing* that it is a truth" (97). It is this belief in the truth of photographic representation that ultimately proves destructive in Brand's texts. For instance, despite evidence to the contrary, the children of "Photograph" and the characters of *At the Full and Change of the Moon* invest photographs with an ability to fulfill their desire for familial connection. They thereby face dismay and disillusion when photographs cannot achieve this promise. In *What We All Long For*, Tuyen, her family, and even Quy himself become so reliant on photographic representation that there is little room for experiencing each other as living, feeling people. Consequently, Brand suggests, to freeze or try to possess the past and its inhabitants through photography is to face the threat of being possessed by that past and its players. Photographs, thus, may promise to counter the experience of "drift" by offering a means of more firmly rooting oneself in an ancestral heritage, but in the end, Brand's representation questions if such a grounding is possible or even desirable.

Notes

1. In its focus on Tuyen's surrealist style in *What We All Long For*, Heather Smyth's "The Being Together of Strangers': Dionne Brand's Politics of Difference and the Limits of Multicultural Discourse" provides perhaps the most extensive look at the representation of the visual arts in Brand's work. Other explorations of Brand's representation of visual media include Diana Brydon's "Reading Dionne Brand's 'Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater,'" which discusses the Mammy Prater picture of *No Language is Neutral*, and Héliane Ventura's "Dionne Brand: 'Photograph' L'Apparemment de l'Artist dans une Nouvelle des Caraïbes ou la Poétique de la Trace, entre Image Photographique et Magie de l'Empreinte," which explores Brand's story "Photograph."

2. I use the word *suture* here purposefully. I am intending it in part to reflect the medical meaning of sewing something together to (re)make a whole, an

idea that is similar to the trope of prosthesis that will play a larger part in this argument. In addition, my use of the word is meant to resonate with the term's use in film theory, where suturing is the process through which the viewer gains connection to the images being seen. As a viewer inhabits the perspective of the camera's gaze, that viewer can become sutured to the character whose eyeline the camera represents. *Suture* in this usage suggests the means through which a viewer of film comes to vicariously inhabit a visual construction, an inhabitation that is much like what I am suggesting occurs with a viewer's experience of a photograph.

3. In *thirsty*, there is a similar use of a photograph to confirm existence across distance. Alan "sent [his] likeness" to his mother "long ago to say / that he was doing well" (9). That this photograph enables his mother's prosthetic connection to him is confirmed by how well-used the photograph has been. Its corners are now "finger-worn" (9), suggesting her frequent appeal to it as a means of breaching distances.

4. Interestingly, this use of photographs to chart development is something Quay also seeks. Noting that he was frequently photographed at the refugee camp, he acknowledges that he is "the one who is smiling brilliantly less and less and then giving up on that more and more" (9), but he does not "suppose it showed up in the pictures" (9). He is correct that this development of his character would not show up in the pictures because these photos would likely never be collected in one space. Although he seems to envision these photographs put to use in a traditional way—a forming of them into a cohesive collection, a family album, for instance, where his growth can be witnessed—in reality these images are most likely dispersed, and many are probably not even publicly viewable. As such, similar to *At the Full and Change of the Moon's* suggestion that the fragmentation of Marie Ursule's family is communicated through its lack of collected photographs, the fact that Quay's photos would likely not be collected in one space similarly suggests his loss of family, a loss of those who would care to chart his development in the first place.

5. I would suggest that Brand's earlier focus on "drift" evolves into *Thirsty's* metaphor of "skim[ming]." In *Thirsty*, Brand writes, "don't dwell too long, don't stand still here, / I skim, I desert, I break off the edges"; she warns that "you have / to be on your toes or else you'll drown" (22). To skim is to not "fall / into" another's "particular need" (42). Similar to her fashioning of "the drift" as a mode of belonging, "to skim" could suggest a certain sense of disconnection from others. Nevertheless, neither of these metaphors cynically advocates a state of alienation as the best mode of being. In *Thirsty*, after all, many characters do "fall / into" the needs of others. Echoing Goldman, I suggest that the focus in these metaphors is less on alienation and more on

one's ability to move freely, to experience multiple sites of belonging and not be innately weighed down by one's histories or conditions. The difference between drifting and skimming, however, marks an important evolution in thought. In particular, a comparison of these two metaphors reveals a movement towards an increased sense of agency in one's motion. To drift is to be directionless, aimless, exerting no control of motion; to skim, however, is to be in control of not sinking and master of that balancing act.

6. Although I cite Celia Lury's conception of "seeing photographically," her formation of this idea appears to be informed by Sontag's earlier assertion that photographic "technology made possible an ever increasing spread of that mentality which looks at the world as a set of potential photographs" (7). Sontag continues by asserting that this new way of seeing affects one's sense of self: "We learn to see ourselves photographically: to regard oneself as attractive is, precisely, to judge that one would look good in a photograph" (85).

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