

## Interpreting Photographic Portraits: Autobiography, Time Perspectives, and Two School Photographs

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narrative; time  
perspectives

**Abstract:** This article is a "companion" piece to a more general discussion in the preceding article, Brian ROBERTS' (2011) "Photographic Portraits: Narrative and Memory". Here the attempt is to enhance current attention to visual materials by exploring a particular interpretive approach to the photographic portrait—self-image—images taken of us by ourselves or taken by others (portraits taken by friends or relatives, or by professionals), alone or as part of a group. The article is autobiographical in focus; it explores how we "look" at personal photographs and associate them with memories of our past, our current experience, and the future. It uses as examples two school photographs taken in 1956-8 of me (the author) aged six to eight years old and applies a form of analysis employing "time perspectives" and a range of associated concepts. Two narratives are given: first, a commentary on the two school photographs and my childhood development (e.g. physical, intellectual) between six to eight years old, and second, my current outlook and activities and how they connect with the memories raised by the photographs.

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## 1. The Use of Photographic Portraits—A Personal "Archaeology" of Consciousness/ the Senses<sup>1</sup>

Along with many other social science researchers I have become increasingly interested in the visual and other senses (touch, smell, taste, and hearing) and forms of communication as research topics, practice, and reportage (ROBERTS, 2008; see also BALL & GILLIGAN, 2010; JONES et al., 2008; KNOBLAUCH, BAER, LAURIER, PETSCHKE & SCHNETTLER, 2008; HOWES, 2003, 2005; FINNEGAN, 2002; PINK, 2006; RODAWAY, 2004; STOLLER, 1997). My recent interest has centred on photography (both in research about its genres and history, and in taking my own photographs) and how it affects my long-term involvement in biographical work (see ROBERTS, 2002). This photographic activity has also led me to re-scrutinise my early life by looking again at personal and family photographs. The result is a kind of ongoing personal "archaeology"—(an) emerging narrative(s)—to uncover the visual, spatial, historical, and other aspects of my self-abilities and outlook. These developments in childhood were responding to and sought to understand the experience of my surroundings at the time. [1]

Some years ago I wrote an article, "An Auto/Biographical Account of Educational Experience" (ROBERTS, 1998), a narrative on my school life from the mid 1950s to 1968, when I began a degree in social science. In the "auto/biographical" account, while there is discussion of feelings attached to particular events, activities, and views on the schools I attended, the "personal" is generally associated with an emerging strong sense of social class and experience of class transition.<sup>2</sup> But some important emotional elements of my school life were omitted. I did not include a wider range of sensual, affective experiences and the importance of particular personal relations, e.g. more detailed reactions to educational setbacks, antipathy towards the grammar school ethos, feelings towards girls, encouragement and support from certain teachers, sibling relations, and the importance of '60s pop music to me (especially, The Beatles, The Byrds, and Bob Dylan), friendships and adolescent male culture, etc.. Surprisingly, looking back on the article now, it did not seem to occur to me to include some school photographs of myself between the ages of 5-18 years (or of the four schools I attended) for comment. [2]

The archaeology of my childhood I have undertaken, and the resulting narratives reported below, focus on the period between the ages six and eight years when it seems I underwent a series of significant changes in perception and consciousness (e.g. visual, spatial, body, time, historical dimensions of self-

1 This article has been inspired by a number of photographers, especially by the (very different) work of Claude CAHUN, Alexander RODCHENKO, Dorothea LANGE; Gerda TARO, and Francesca WOODMAN (see ALLMER, 2009; CURTIS, 2011, pp.141-156; GORDON & OKIHIRO, 2006; JONES, 2006; LAVRENTIEV, 2008; LANGE, 1982, 1995; PIERINI, 2009; SCHABER, WHELAN & LUBBEN, 2007; TOWNSEND, 2006; TUPITSYN, 2009; YOUNG & BALSELLS, 2010; WHISTON SPIRN, 2009) and the vibrancy of memory (of family and place) found in the paintings of Marc CHAGAL (see GADDI & PETROVA, 2009; WALTHER & METZGER, 2006; WULLSCHLAGER, 2010).

2 For the use of the term "auto/biography", see ROBERTS (2002, pp.72-92) and ERBEN (1998), STANLEY and MORGAN (1993), STANLEY (1992).

development) about the social world. The first narrative (Sections 2 and 3) begins with a commentary on two school photographs and then extends to the associated memories that they evoke, the second narrative (Sections 5 and 6) explores the connections between the photographs (and the commentary and associated memories) and my contemporary life and concerns.<sup>3</sup> [3]

## **2. Two School Photographs 1956-8—My Initial Response Today (Early 2010)**

How do we look at photographs from our past? How can people put themselves autobiographically "into the picture" and understand how they were then? It seems that when we see an old photographic self-image we immediately attempt to place the portrait, not only by location and occasion but in time, according to our understandings of past, present, and future. [4]

I possess two photographs taken at school between ages of six and eight years (Illustrations 1 and 2 below). Looking at these photographs recently, after some years, brought both "recurrence", as conscious acts of remembering, more spontaneous memories, and memory as a "return" (re-storing, re-living), and also, "fantasy" (what could/might have been) (see ROBERTS, 2011). I have seen the school photographs many times before but have not previously "studied" them in any detail. Below are my first reactions to the photographs *now* (early 2010) (with more detailed, associated "reflections" in Section 3).<sup>4</sup>

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3 I have little academic expertise on what generally takes place in child development during the period 6-8 years old—and have not discussed my own experiences in sufficient detail with others (although have often mentioned some of them in part) to know if these are "usual" or commonly remembered. For a review of the development and current work within "childhood sociology" (across Europe) see BUHLER-NIEDERBERGER (2010a). The notion of "children's agency" or "child as a social actor" appears to be relevant to the broad orientation of this article (see BUHLER-NIEDERBERGER, 2010b, p.159; ZEIHNER, 2010). It is perhaps difficult to categorise these memories from my childhood. I am tempted to call these "memories" simply "imaginative scenes", rather than be more prescriptive and describe them as types of "epiphanies" (c.f. DENZIN, 1989), "turning points"—or take a "deeper" Freudian route and discuss them in terms of "screen memories" (or "primal scenes")—in relation to my use of the term "recurrence". Certainly, there is my "return" to these instances and developments in childhood, and I have had some fascination with them over the years, but this is not to instigate a notion of "compulsion" and "repetition", but merely to recognise them as significant in my perceptual and intellectual changes and rising self/social consciousness. I am aware of the debates in psychology in relation to "false memory" and autobiographical memory—some things we may very clearly "remember" (for various reasons) from the past but (we may realise) are inaccurate or untrue; memories are also subject to forms of revision. For some approaches to memory and biography see ROBERTS (2002).

4 The two school photographs are taken from a photograph album of childhood and family pictures—and could have been interpreted in that context, possibly leading to additional memories and narrative(s). Only about two other photographs in the album seem to have been taken when I was between the ages of six to eight. I have seen another photograph of me in the classroom at that age but been unable to obtain a copy. Another "analysis" could be added to the article: using recent portraits I could apply the same diagrams (Tables 1 and 2) and attempt to provide narratives and interpretations of them in terms of the time perspectives—and the earlier photographs. School photographs are among the most common "formal portrait" photographs taken, alongside wedding and birthday (or other celebration) pictures (and we could include professional or photo-booth, etc. pictures often taken for ID purposes). However, more "informal portrait" pictures by an individual and others are increasingly taken due to ease and spread of technology; i.e. via digital cameras and mobile phones which also enable much greater sharing of images (sent by phone, Web, etc.).



Illustration 1: School photograph 1, age six [5]

I am not completely certain of my age when this school photograph was taken but I am around the age of six years. It has the quality of a studio portrait and I look surprisingly smart, at least when compared with the second photograph below (and later school photographs and teachers' comments in school reports on my untidy appearance, still in my possession). I remember the colours on the patterned tie and the greyness of the shirt and jacket. In this image I seem self assured, with an enigmatic half smile (a "*Mona Lisa* smile?") but, am I mainly assessing the situation and the taker? I seem very composed, and mature for my age, and in some control of the situation (although with still a hint of defensiveness?).



Illustration 2: School photograph 2, age eight [6]

As with the first photograph, I am not sure here of my exact age but the lapel badge is from a fan club for Corgi model toy cars that only began in December 1956, so I would be at least six and a half years old. Again, it is almost certainly a school photograph (although the school did not have a uniform—I was wearing a second hand blue blazer with yellow piping, the tie was also yellow with red horses' heads). Here I am a little "scruffy", hair badly cut (probably by my father) and I look happy if rather more nervous or embarrassed than in the earlier photograph. Although smiling, still the narrowness of my eyes suggests a degree of wariness, as if (again) carefully assessing what is going on. [7]

When looking at the photographs again, combined with previous memories, various "involuntary" memories came to mind (e.g. as in the colours of the school clothes I am wearing) and also some more "voluntary" memories (e.g. participation in various school lessons and activities such as learning "times tables", folk dancing, and boys' and girls' playground games). There is also an active "return" (or reconsideration) to past experiences, such as memories of the classroom and how early experiences shaped my later attitudes towards schooling. In viewing the photographs, these various kinds of "recurrence" (i.e. "involuntary" memories which arise "spontaneously" in the mind, "voluntary" memories which we consciously remember, and "return" through which we consider the past in some deeper reflection) (see ROBERTS, 2011) were activated within a backwards-forwards movement in thought and feeling between "then" and "now". [8]

### **3. My Sensual and Personal/Intellectual Developments and the Two School Photographs**

The following sections (3.1-7) are my more detailed recent, initial reactions to the photographs in writing an "autobiographical narrative" for this article, the memories of my life in the 1950s. As I viewed them at more length, again, memories came due to all three variants of "recurrence". As I peered back, I began to make narrative connections using the photographs—these drew me (it seems) to a greater understanding of my life development as a child between six to eight years old. Of course, much of the experiences described below have been "remembered" before and variously related to others (family, friends) at times but with less detail and connection. I have not previously attempted as systematically to order, and outline in depth, my sensual and intellectual experiences and my developing consciousness of the social world of my childhood—and form an intricate, reflective narrative. What emerged in looking more intently at the photographs was that I realised my senses (vision, sound, etc.) were being sharpened and connected to an exploration of time, space, body, and intellect during the period. It could be said I was experiencing a phenomenological widening and deepening in consciousness. My current understanding of this realisation corresponds to a conception of the senses used in recent academic work—"as unavoidably interconnected and treats touch, taste, smell and sounds as well as vision as repositories of knowledge and memory" (PINK, 2006, p.45; see FINNEGAN, 2002). [9]

#### **3.1 Historical consciousness: "Living in a museum"**

Until the age of eight and a half years old, I lived in a small village in northern England which has strong associations with *The Pilgrim Fathers*—the religious "separatists" ("dissenters" from the Church of England who are connected to the American celebrations of Thanksgiving Day) who sailed to America in 1620. The village school I attended was named after *The Pilgrim Fathers'* ship the "Mayflower", and one of the two village pubs was renamed *The Pilgrim Fathers*, in my childhood. In early 1957, a replica, *Mayflower II*, crossed the Atlantic, recreating the original voyage—receiving much publicity in both the USA and UK.

There were celebrations in the village, including at my school. Our home was rented and very old (early 17th century) and was situated next to the church and cemetery; the grave of my uncle (and later of my grandfather) was visible just over our garden wall, only a few yards away from our house. Under the rental agreement set by the landlord (a local titled estate) we were not allowed to use the largest downstairs room; it had to be kept as a museum (containing old furniture, pewter plates, a book of poetry—chained to the wall!, a visitors' book, and an open fireplace with a large cauldron)—we called it the "antique room". Any visitors were to be shown the room for free. We had numerous American tourists and some other visitors (including historians) who took photographs of the house and, sometimes, our family. For instance, one day five coach loads of American tourists (perhaps during the 1957 celebrations) appeared unannounced to see our house and village, perhaps a "stop off" on their way from London to York and Edinburgh along the old Great North Road. For a period afterwards some of the American visitors kept in contact (sending letters, including invitations to my brother, sister, and myself to holiday in the US, and photographs of their visit and their own houses). A stone plaque above the outside door of the antique room stated that a leader of *The Pilgrim Fathers* had lived in the house—the plaque was later removed after it was established that another house in the village had that honour. Perhaps because of these visitors and the historical associations of the village, it could be said, I began to have a strong consciousness of history. I was certainly very keen to study history at home at this time and it was my favourite subject throughout schooling. At the age of nine (at a school in a nearby town) I was allowed by my teacher to study history topics on my own ahead of the class and set out materials for the class lesson. [10]

### 3.2 Space and time: "Stopping the world"

At about the age of seven I had the idea that if I ran very fast, as fast as I could, around a street corner in the village that I would then be able to see that everyone, the world, had stopped—and that only I was moving and aware that life was still! This perception was probably fuelled, in part, by my enthusiastic running everywhere around the village. I have often thought of this perception of space and time—and told others, some of whom (perhaps only half-jokingly) commented it was an early sign of egotism, a self-centredness! But, this experience does convey a strong sense of "the self-in-the-world", by stopping and stepping outside the social world, an awareness of the self in space and time. Conversely, I also saw the "world as going passed": the London-Edinburgh main train line runs half a mile from the village and I experienced the excitement brought by watching and hearing express steam locomotives (the "Streaks") and seeing people in the carriages flash by at the end of "Station Lane". As children we stood still at the train crossing and waited for the keeper to open the gates for us to go through to collect birds' eggs and pick blackberries in the marsh meadows and along the river on the other side. In later years, I have occasionally passed the village at high speed on express trains to and from London and the North—looking out for a small world that I see only for a few seconds. [11]

### **3.3 Sound, body, and motion: "Music and movement"**

Only recently—in the past year—I realised that my awareness of the interrelation between time and space in the notion of the "the world stood still" above, was probably stimulated by the BBC Radio *Schools Music and Movement* programme we took part in as school children. Before the radio programme commenced, the classroom chairs and tables were put to one side and we danced or moved following the radio presenter's instructions: one activity involved dancing around in a circle and being told to "All be trees", as soon as the music stopped. Not surprisingly, in practice, this included some nudging of other children on the way round and several of us on purpose stopping several moments after the others, when the music had already finished and they had stood still. It seems I may well have related this activity to the possibility of "catching" the world motionless. Music and movement also featured prominently elsewhere in my life: as a choirboy and Sunday School member I attended the village church next to our house several times a week. The sound of the church bells calling for service attendance, walking in the choir led by the vicar down the aisle to the sound of the organ (at the beginning and end of a service), standing up to sing hymns, and other rituals (e.g. at weddings), left impressions of sounds-and-movement—and the importance of the "timing" of activities. [12]

My sensitivity to body and motion was enhanced by the fact that at the age of five I broke my right leg; I had jumped from an apple tree branch, fallen over, and could not move. I was carried home on my father's back and rushed ten miles in an ambulance with its siren sounding, to hospital. This was a significant incident since I had to have a plaster pot on my leg for six weeks and was pushed around outdoors in a pram by my mother. In a sense, I was motionless (in the pram) as the world went passed, as when taken shopping or meeting my older brother and sister at school. I know from this incident that by the age of five I could tell the time; I remember seeing the hospital operating theatre clock was at 9:15 pm and long after my bedtime. So, by the age of six to eight I had achieved a very good understanding of "clock time". [13]

It seems the interconnection between music-time-body/activity were being experienced in these quite specific but important incidents in my life and were developing in my consciousness, adding to an evolving recognition of myself in the social world of the village. [14]

### **3.4 Colour, dreams, consciousness: "Dreaming in colour" and "flying in dreams"**

At this time, I began to explore dreaming—more specifically how to try to make sure I dreamed in colour. On going to bed I would close my eyes and "look" at the inside of my eyelids—this generated moving coloured speckles and shapes; when sleep came I hoped to have dreams that would have something of the swirl of colour and images of the "psychedelic". Interestingly, I saw my first film at the cinema at this age—*Oklahoma*—and I still remember seeing such vivid colours (yellows and blues) for the first time up on the huge screen above me as I sat in

the darkness. In dreaming, I also wished I would levitate and fly, repeating previous dream experiences of floating towards the ceiling and sometimes drifting out of the bedroom window into the night. In my reading I was fascinated by the night-time flying of *Peter Pan*, and by *Rupert Bear's* flight in a kind of dodgem car (my favourite fairground ride) to see Father Christmas in his castle. It seems in trying to induce colour and shapes in dreaming that I was anticipating—and trying to influence—my REM sleep which has these various effects.<sup>5</sup> In the experience of going to sleep I was experimenting with the relations between colour, shapes, and consciousness, and possibly (it may be surmised), even a feeling of "out of body experience" (i.e. looking down from above on the material self). [15]

### **3.5 Reading, writing and verbal expression: "Joined up writing" and "general knowledge"**

I was very keen and good at reading and writing. I was becoming an avid reader of adventure stories and history. But one frustration I felt, having become proud to be a fluent reader and able to do "joined up writing", was in the difficulty I had in understanding adult handwriting. This became apparent to me one day when my father (a painter and decorator) brought home a notebook he had found in an empty house he was working on. It contained descriptions and pictures (drawings and photographs) of British castles. I was very disappointed that although I had learned to read, I could not decipher the joined up writing in the notebook on my favourite subject. (My own handwriting was very untidy; at the age of nine it was deemed so bad that I had to attend additional special classes to correct it.) In fact, castles had become a passion; I collected pictures and information in a scrapbook I made from brown paper and flour paste (and I had a similar one for newspaper photographs and articles on football). I would also play for hours with my favourite toys—a castle and knights. I was very devoted to obtaining general information (e.g. on geography) through my reading and also very motivated to answer questions in class. Subsequently, my general knowledge was regarded as high and I received end of year School book prizes on the subject. By the age of eight, I was reading "factual" information, collecting materials and writing in notebooks, and making some impression at school by the depth and range of my knowledge. In my final junior year report (when I was nearly 11 years old), I was assessed as "outstandingly good" in "oral work" by my Headmaster. [16]

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5 LEWIS-WILLIAMS, in his book "Mind in the Cave", attempts to account for prehistoric cave painting through an exploration of "altered states of consciousness" that can be induced in various ways, such as by drugs and the effects of darkness in caves, and discusses dreaming and the characteristics of REM sleep (seeing moving geometric shapes, colours, experiencing flying or falling) (2002, pp.121-135, 282). For a short summary of some recent research work on forms of consciousness and dreaming, see HAMZELOU (2010) and YOUNG (2011). The former article reports (p.38) that children who describe most dreams also appear to have more sophisticated mental imagery when awake, which may be due to the development of parts of the brain associated with visual and spatial abilities. For recent work on "brainwaves" (rhythmic electrical activity in neurons) in relation to transmission of vision and the "storage" and "retrieval" of past and recent memories, see THOMSON (2010).



### 3.6 Comics and children's TV: "Imagination and adventure"

Children's comics were very important to me at this time in childhood. The vibrancy and action of the illustrations they contained were very attractive; the text also provided a great stimulus to my imagination and was very important in developing my reading abilities. I was especially drawn (a little later) to stories about working class characters—in football and athletics—who gave me heroes by achieving success against obstacles (particularly class barriers) and, thereby, gave me "biographical templates" to guide me in future challenges (ROBERTS, 1995, 1998, 2004a). At this age (six to eight years old), watching *William Tell*, *Robin Hood*, and a number of cowboy Westerns for children (e.g. *The Lone Ranger and Hopalong Cassidy*) on my grandparents' very small, black and white, shilling coin in the slot TV after school gave me a want of adventure, which was translated into games around the village (and at school) with other boys. The occasional comic book for Christmas and school (and Sunday School) book prizes fed my reading interest and imagination. When our family moved from the village when I was eight and a half years old, my teacher asked me to choose a book as a leaving present from the classroom bookshelf—I chose an abridged version of *Moby Dick*. After our family went to live in a nearby town I became a regular visitor on Saturdays to the local public library. [17]

### 3.7 The village: "Contours" and "horizons"

My home and the small village and its immediate surroundings were the main "contours" of my world—setting the major limits not simply of my social relationships and physical environment but also the "horizons" for my conscious mind. I was allowed to roam and explore the village lanes, fields, and streams. I took in the sounds and smells from the farmyards, the sight of wildlife, and took part in or witnessed patterns of social interaction (gossiping, fetes, church services, and the work of the three farms in the village). Trips beyond the village were few. The small town, one and a half miles away, was visited for groceries and other shopping, the doctors' surgery and the cinema. A rare trip was to a large town ten miles away which had a large department store and the local hospital. One year, after seeing Father Christmas at the major store I was delighted that on the way home we secured the front seats upstairs on the double-decker bus I could get a grandstand view of the journey back to my village. The major trip each year was a holiday in our three-wheeled van to the South-West (Devon and Cornwall) to camp in our camouflaged ex-army tent at several seaside sites. A very strong memory of the journey is the change in the brightness and colours of daylight—the blues became more blue, the yellows more yellow—as we headed westward. [18]

Between the ages of six and eight years I was experiencing a growth in my intellectual and sensual abilities—in forming a degree of historical consciousness; an awareness of the interconnections between space and time; realising connections between sound, body, and motion; exploring colour and consciousness in waking/dreaming; and rapidly developing verbal and written expression. In "discovering" the village, I was also expanding my mind and

learning about its visual and other capabilities. Looking at the two school photographs again not only brings this world into vision in my mind, but opens it evocatively across the senses, touching the emotions and leading to a clearer understanding of my intellectual and social development. But, how are we to understand the processes whereby we interpret both the photographs of childhood and the memories they engender?<sup>6</sup> [19]

#### 4. Photographic Portraits and Time Perspectives<sup>7</sup>

"Time" is a core aspect of our humanity, being central to how we structure the meaning of our lives; our life-understandings of ourselves and experience are formed within perceptions of the past-present-future (ADAM, 1990, p.127; see also RICOEUR, 1981, p.174, 1984, 1985, 1988). We traverse across past, present, and future not only in a linear, chronological fashion but backwards and forwards, and in other directions. In doing so, we form narratives to connect experiences and shape a notion of self (c.f. GERGEN, 1999; GERGEN & GERGEN, 1984; BROCKMEIER, 2001; see ROBERTS, 2011). For instance, when we see images of ourselves we place these in time or "timings"—complex understandings of our experience according to multiple perceptions of past, present and future. In this way, a "photographic self image" is "timed"—when we look at our portrait it is placed in relation to our existing notions, timings, and questions regarding the self (e.g. "Who I am now"; "Who will I be?"). According to MEAD, "our pasts are always mental in the same manner in which the futures that lie in our imaginations ahead of us are mental" (as cited in FLAHERTY & FINE, 2001, p.152; see ROBERTS, 2007a, pp.43-44). We hold (in the "multiple" present) multiple futures and multiple pasts. In short, as BROCKMEIER argues:

"Real or imagined, narrated or enacted, discovered in one's past or projected into one's future, our possible lives are a constitutive part of our selves. Fundamentally, to live possible lives in possible worlds is inherent to the human condition ... it is impossible to assume that there is only one story, one true representation of a life" (2002, p.462). [20]

Thus, at its simplest, we imaginatively construct and reconstruct our lives in time, and search for continuity and unity in the face of fragmentation brought by the diversities of recall, current situations and dilemmas, and future uncertainties. We are caught between two tendencies in our construction of a narrative: one is towards either stasis/stagnancy *or* repetition in personal narrative where new elements (in outlook, ideas, and reflection) are not introduced and old ones repeated, the other is towards degeneration *or* fragmentation in personal narrative with a disintegration in the consistency of perceptions by the individual of her or his life and social world (see FRANK, 1984; ROBERTS, 2011).

6 It is probable that at this stage (six to eight years) I was beginning to be aware of social hierarchies (age, class and gender), competition and status, in my experiences of family, village life and schooling (e.g. how the family was socially placed in the village, the competitive nature of schooling). Certainly, by the ages of 12-13 years I had a strong sense of family position, class, and a firm (and continuing) political attachment to the Labour Party in the UK.

7 This discussion of time perspectives and the accompanying Tables 1 and 2 develop previous versions, see ROBERTS (1999, 2004b, 2004c).

Reviewing and "re-viewing" our memories (and previous narratives) is an attempt at coherence and continuity without the costs of atrophy preventing new interpretations and experiences or being lost in flitting responses to the seeming swirl of daily events (HUNTER, 1964, p.183). [21]

When "composing" our autobiographical narrative(s), as in my responses to the school photographs, we make imaginative connections between the life events and experiences that arise (see ROBERTS, 2011). We search for relationships between our experiences in a myriad of ways: we try to find links between one experience-event and another, and explanations (through notions of fate, chance, and choice, etc.) of how the fragments of life are diachronically and synchronically attached. In doing so, we also employ various rhetorical means, such as simile, metaphor, and metonymy, to organise our recollections—to order, re-order, erase, and recall experiences. We can say that in considering photographs of ourselves we construct self-perceptions and self-sensations in the process of looking, and produce imaginings of self. This process takes place through the operation of "time perspectives" and directions between them (c.f. MEAD, 1932; SCHUTZ, 1971; see Tables 1 and 2, below). For example, we may move between Past-past (the Past as/in the past), to Future-past (the Future as/in the past) to Present-future (the Present as/in the future), or in some other direction—backwards, forwards, sideways, diagonally, in fashioning a life account.

Past	Present	Future
Past-past	Present-past	Future-past
Past-present	Present-present	Future-present
Past-future	Present-future	Future-future

Table 1: Time perspectives—our pasts-presents-futures [22]

We ascribe meaning to our experiences by interpreting and relating events and feelings (a framing of experience) through "time perspectives" by using "time tenses" and constructing "summaries" (general views, metaphors) that form part of a more general "narrative outlook" (e.g. nostalgia). Experiences are thereby understood by arranging and placing them according to time tenses or by moving *through* one time tense to another. By this means, we may reinterpret certain experiences or shift from one set of remembered emotions and sensual experiences to another, under the influence of those that affect us now. The time tenses we use may alter even within a single conversation (or transcribed interview or written life story, as in narrative research), and from one situation to another, separated, perhaps, by only a small interval. In our "doings" of everyday life we live through understandings of past and future, order and change, through narrative construction. Time perspectives must not be seen as simply discrete entities. They "blur" into each other or may overlap in consciousness as an individual moves between them, according to reflection, continued experience, and context, again for example, they operate in this way when we observe, think about and discuss photographs of self. In trying to understand how we see and narrate our photographs, we must, therefore, not assume that we always merely

construct a sequential, linear, chronological account, as may be implied by the narrative notions of "story" and "plot". Instead, a narrative account of an episode or "life-time" may take various forms and individuals may shift in self-understanding between constructions.<sup>8</sup> [23]

It may seem a rather forlorn hope, at least a very difficult task, to examine photographs from the past, in this case pictures of me taken over 50 years ago, to try to "recover" in *some connected detail* the memories directly associated with the images and reconstruct my experiences, abilities, and consciousness of the time. An additional major complication is to try to understand my reactions and interpretations to the photographs by placing them in relation to the present (as/as if now) *and* the future (as/as if sometime ahead in life). Nevertheless, it can be pointed out that, while it is a "challenge" and we cannot fully restore the past, and memory is selective and otherwise fallible, we *do* routinely react to photographs by thinking of ourselves in the past situation according to legacies and "re-views" and by responding within our current composition of self (as/as if) *in the present and future*. Here, I am attempting a more systematic "reading" and construction of the associations with the two photographs than we do in ordinary daily life, by attempting to understand how we "read" photographs by attaching meanings (including sensual references) via memory; i.e. recurrence (as involuntary, voluntary, and return), and thereby, compose (or re-compose) notions of self (see ROBERTS, 2011). [24]

In Table 2—Photographic portraits and time perspectives—the connection is made between time perspectives (as outlined in Table 1) and photographic portraits, with reference to my two school photographs. How we "read", or rather better, "relate" to photographs is explored in detail (in Table 2) by using a number of interpretive devices:

1. A "time perspective" (see Table 1) is the general time orientation of an individual's life narrative (and includes a "time tense" and "narrative outlook").
2. A "time tense" is our conception of time, how we understand and act according to past, present, and future by conceiving one through another; e.g. the Present as/in the past.
3. The "photographic self-image" is the conception of the self held by an individual related to the "time tense". An individual will "in reality" hold aspects of more than one self-image or be moving between them (see SMITH & SPARKES, 2002).
4. A "self-interpretation of photographic image" means that we place ourselves in the photograph not simply through recognition of social and physical situations. Importantly, we locate ourselves through a "time tense" (i.e. then, now, ahead), and our perception of self (or selves) (i.e. who or what we were,

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8 Tables 1 and 2 could be criticised as being very typological (as static, restricting possibilities, and culturally limited with, perhaps, an underlying constraining structuralism) in approach—they are not intended to be. Allowance is made for movement between time perspectives in past, present, and future with different trajectories being taken. The tables should be read in a "fluid" manner to reveal the multiple, shifting, and interpretively complex way in which we construct an understanding of ourselves through time perspectives.

we are, or will be?). My own primary self-interpretation in response to the two school photographs draws on a notion of the Past-present (see Section 5). However, while one time perspective may be dominant, we move between time perspectives—as circumstances and self-reflection alter. (In Table 2 below, I have included the two school photographs in other time perspectives to try to understand how I might, on another occasion, perceive them differently, see Section 5—and to indicate how others may "see" their own photographs.)

5. "Narrative outlook" is associated with the act of looking at a photograph of ourselves. It may induce a general mood, outlook, imagery, etc. regarding our past, present, and future but as experienced in our current everyday circumstances. The narrative outlook, therefore, has a number of features: "typical expression" is a brief oral or written account which infers or assumes a time tense in relation to a photograph of oneself. It may reflect a pessimistic (+), optimistic (+), or neutral (=) condition in mood towards oneself and others, and life circumstances (O'MALLEY, 1972, p.103; see also GERGEN 1999; GERGEN & GERGEN, 1984; and McADAMS's similar idea of "narrative tone" [1993, pp. 47-50]). A "life connection(s)" notes the types of interpretations (e.g. "fate") made to link and understand multifarious events and experiences in relation to a photograph. "Mythical/metaphoric summary" refers to a term or statement we make that encapsulates our life, our trajectory, perhaps as a guiding principle (see ROBERTS, 2004d). These summaries may indicate how we take a linear, circle, fragmentary, or some other narrative mode (see BROCKMEIER, 2000) through time perspectives as we respond to a photograph.
6. "Fantasy lives" may be indicated as a photograph brings to mind alternatives we now perceive (or see once again) as being viable (or non-viable)—in the past, present or future: "What if" lives, "possible lives" (c.f. BROCKMEIER, 2002); "What we might have been/might be now/might become". Here, "fantasy" (or "phantasy") is seen as reflective mental image-making and expression and containing rather more than whimsicality or fancifulness.
7. The "direction of time perspective construction" recognises that individuals move in narrative formation between and within past, present and future e.g. in the time tense—"Present as/in the past"—the present is read according to/through an "understanding" of the "past". So, while there appears a "sameness" between some time perspectives (and as expressed as typical expressions), the direction of the time tense makes the difference apparent e.g. Present-*to*-past rather than Past-*to*-present. A time perspective held by an individual is in movement or is unstable; if it varies in fixity according to the person and her or his interaction with changing circumstances. The shift from one time perspective to another can be, at one extreme, "abrupt" due to some new sudden insight, *or* at the other, merely confirming previous understandings and, perhaps, "slow", as previous meanings re-emerge, are modified, or new insights consolidated. It may seem for some that the past has ended (Past-past) or the future is unknown (Future-future) (as indicated by the brackets "]" and "["—representing perceived fissures in time perspective construction).

## **PAST**

### *Past-past*

Time tense: the Past as/in the past.

Photographic self-image: the lost self or archetypal self: e.g., the two school photographs.

Self-interpretation of photographic image: Was that (?)/That was—me: Does (?)/The photograph show(s) a previous "me"—one that has ended and cannot be recovered.

Narrative outlook: e.g., nostalgia, finality. Typical expression: My life was different then.

Life connection(s): e.g., choice (new start made—an epiphany), repetition ("stuck" in past). Mythical/metaphoric summary: e.g., conversion, revelation.

Fantasy life (lives): My life could have been different then.

Direction of time perspective construction: <<<<<<<<<<] (within the Past).

### *Past-present*

Time tense: the Past as/in the present.

Photographic self-image: the continuous self. This is my dominant interpretation of the two school photographs.

Self-interpretation of photographic image: Was (?)/I was—what I am now: Does (?)/The photograph show(s) something that is still me in physical attributes and character.

Narrative outlook: e.g., reminiscence. Typical expression: What I was I am now. Life

connection(s): e.g. force as determined (externally) and/or motivated (internally).

Mythical/metaphoric summary: e.g., journey.

Fantasy life (lives): I could be today what I might have been then.

Direction of time perspective construction: >>>>>>>>> (from Past to present).

### *Past-future*

Time tense: the Past as/in the future.

Photographic self-image: The return of a former self: e.g., the two school photographs.

Self-interpretation of photographic image: Will I (?)/I will—look as I did, again; Does (?)/The photograph portray(s) something of me that will come back again.

Narrative outlook: e.g., legacy. Typical expression: I will be as I was then. Life

connection(s): e.g., serendipity. Mythical/metaphoric summary: e.g., return, resurrection.

Fantasy life (lives): I could be what I might have been then.

Direction of time perspective construction: >>>>>>>>> (from Past to future).

## **PRESENT**

### *Present-past*

Time tense: the Present as/in the past.

Photographic self-image: the retained self: e.g., the two school photographs

Self-interpretation of photographic image: Am I (?)/I am—as I was then; Does (?)/The photograph show(s) me as I am today—something essentially me.

Narrative outlook: e.g. reflection. Typical expression: My life is as it was then. Life connection(s): e.g., déjà-vu. Mythical/metaphoric summary: e.g., re-enactment, retroactivity, revivalism.

Fantasy life (lives): Had my life been different it could have been the same as then.

Direction of time perspective construction: <<<<<<<<<< (from Present to past).

### *Present-present*

Time tense: the Present as/in the present.

Photographic self-Image: the immediate self: e.g., the two school photographs.

Self-interpretation of photographic image: Is this(?)/This is—me.

Narrative outlook: e.g. contemporaneity, engrossed, self-absorption. Typical expression: I live for today. Life connection(s): e.g., coincidence, randomness, Mythical/metaphoric summary: e.g. river.

Fantasy life (lives): What might I be now?

Direction of time perspective construction: >>>><<<<<<<< (within the Present).

### *Present-future*

Time tense: the Present as/in the future.

Photographic self-image: the emerging self: e.g., the two school photographs.

Self-interpretation of photographic image: Am I (?)/I am—becoming what I will be: Does (?)/The photograph I saw then now shows me as I will be.

Narrative outlook: e.g. portent, anticipation. Typical expression: My life is already changing. Life connection(s): e.g., fate, preordained, ambition. Mythical/metaphoric Summary: e.g., quest, challenge.

Fantasy life (lives): What my life might be is already changing.

Direction of time perspective construction: >>>>>>>>> (from Present to future).

**FUTURE**

*Future-past*

Time tense: the Future as/in the past.

Photographic self-image: the restored self: e.g., the two school photographs.

Self-interpretation of photographic image: Will (?)/I will be like that then: Will a photograph in the future(?)/A photograph in the future will—continue to show what this photograph portrays.

Narrative outlook: e.g., restitution. Typical expression: My life will be as it was then. Life connection(s): e.g., return of choice or constraints as before. Mythical/metaphoric summary: e.g., back to origins/roots.

Fantasy life (lives): My life could be again as it might have been then.

Direction of time perspective construction: <<<<<<<<<< (from Future to past).

*Future-present*

Time tense: the Future as/in the present.

Photographic self-image: the continuing self: e.g., the two school photographs.

Self-interpretation of photographic image: Will I (?)/I will—still be like this; Will a new photograph in the future(?)/A new photograph in the future will—continue to show what the photograph portrays about me now.

Narrative outlook: e.g., prediction. Typical expression: My life will not change. Life connection(s): e.g., uncertainty, fortune. Mythical/metaphoric summary: e.g., arrow.

Fantasy life (lives): I could be what I might be today.

Direction of time perspectives: <<<<<<<<<< (from Future to present).

*Future-future*

Time tense: the Future as/in the future.

Photographic self-image: the possible self (selves) or deconstructed self (abolished): e.g., the two school photographs.

Self-interpretation of photographic image: Will I (?)/I don't—know what I will be like: Will a new photograph (?)/A new photograph will—show what I will become.

Narrative outlook: e.g. fear, unknown, chance. Typical expression: What lies in the future for me? Life connection(s): e.g. uncertainty, unpredictability. Mythical/metaphoric summary: e.g., mystery, unfathomable.

Fantasy life (lives): I might be many things.

Direction of time perspective construction: [>>>>>>>>> (within the Future).

Table 2: Photographic portraits and time perspectives<sup>9</sup> [25]

9 I have considered whether time tenses (as in Table 2) or particular narrative outlooks within a time tense could be associated with colours (n.b. "moods" have long been associated with differing colours, from the ancient Greeks' physiological theory of the humours to the modern psychology of colour, c.f. DEVLIN, 2010). A particular narrative outlook may give the experience of a time tense for an individual a particular "hue". Certainly, the question of whether the visualisation of colour and time perceptions are linked, is an interesting one. Similarly, just as



It is possible that different types of recurrence (memory) (see ROBERTS, 2011) may be more associated with different time perspectives; however, this may be due more to narrative outlook (and broader personality) of an individual. Quite different typical expressions (reflecting different moods), which may affect types of recurrence, can occur within the same time perspective (although a particular spontaneous memory—say, of a personal tragedy would obviously be expected to engender a given narrative expression, such as sadness or regret). Possibly, narrative outlook and forms of recurrence are so intricately intertwined as to be difficult to separate. While recognising the pre-history of how we come to be looking at certain photographs of ourselves in a specific time and place, and the social context of looking (perhaps with friends or family), it is important to remember that in this article I am starting with the photographs themselves, *then* what forms of recurrence begin (which refer to the past situation, senses, emotions, "facts", and subsequent images) and which may stimulate further recurrence. This is *one* (visual) process through which the formation and reformation of narratives of life can take place (rather than starting with a non-visual reference point; e.g., a piece of music or an item of clothing). We sometimes view (or think of) a particular photograph, or similarly use a certain touch, smell, sound, taste to induce or enhance a mood through its associated memories of previous experiences (including other senses). It would be interesting to explore further how mood or deeper mental states may affect how we perceive colour(s) and shapes (and their relations) in photographic portraits—thus, linking memory, visual interpretation, and self/self-image. [26]

In summary, a narrative, by placing ourselves within time, is essential for self-formation. In this process the past self (or selves) is confirmed or recreated and becomes a resource for current, expected, and future notions of self (or selves). These narrative constructions take place in various ways, can produce differing and co-existing forms or models, and may be for multiple uses (and can, at one extreme, exhibit a dynamic, more *or less* unpredictable movement between self-conceptions and/or end in a more or less personal "stasis", at the other). The initial responses (verbally or, merely, in thought) we give when we view a self-portrait/portrait—as in Table 2 above—are commonly in terms of both question and statement; e.g., "Was that (?)/That was me".<sup>10</sup> These responses indicate the

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KANDINSKY (and others) saw a connection between colour and shape (red-square; yellow-triangle; blue-circle) I have thought of how possible linkages between time-mood-colour-shape and senses can be made—but, without much success! I have also been unable to connect the metaphors of veil, screen, window, etc., in interpreting how we see photographs of ourselves, to particular time perspectives, e.g. the possible use of "window" within Past-past. Perhaps, these various attempts at making photographic associations are also too "programmatic", or I have been hypothesising too much!

10 I have not distinguished in much depth differences between types of "looking"; i.e., to see, glance, view, gaze, scrutinise/inspect/examine, and how these may relate differentially to forms of memory and narrative (as in thought or verbalised). Thus, to "look" may be thought of as mundane viewing of our surroundings, whereas "seeing" as more interpretive, reflective, and interrogative. It is not the length of time looking at a photograph or even how intently—it is the *effect* of looking at a particular image in terms of perception and memory that is important. (More broadly, there is very extensive current discussion, across a number of fields, of "witnessing", and associated areas such as "spectatorship"; see for example, WALLIS & DUGGAN [2011] for research on trauma and performance in relation to memory and narrative.) How we "look" at photographs may well be changing due to the ease of reproducing multiple digital images and new technological developments in HD and 3D imagery. Debate is also

doubt that resides in reflective processes—a degree of openness of looking at a picture (and the possibility of surprise)—and in pondering what connection there might be between the person in the image and our contemporary being as the subject/viewer. [27]

## 5. The Two School Photographs 1956-8 and Time Perspectives: My Current Viewing (Mid 2010)

My interpretation of these photographs and associated memories of schooling (and re-reading the earlier article on my education, ROBERTS, 1998) is within two *interrelated* contemporary contexts: *first*, academic—my growing exploration of the visual, within my longer-term concerns with the "biographical"/"narrative". (especially, associated issues of time, memory, and identity); the emotional life of the researcher; and performative social science (ROBERTS, 2002, 2007b, 2008; ROBERTS & KYLLONEN, 2006); and *second*, my wider (but related) contemporary concerns and life experience. My first reaction to looking again, but in more detail and more reflectively, at the school photographs recently (early 2010) was of familiarity: knowing these photographs are of me and having seen them many times before, that reaction is not surprising. But, viewing the photographs again more closely, and aware of the different forms of memory in operation (i.e. recurrence as voluntary, spontaneous, and return, see ROBERTS, 2011), importantly, brought a sense of *a rapidly evolving self during my childhood between ages six to eight*. [28]

In my current viewing (mid 2010) applying time perspectives, I am most drawn to *Past-present* (see Table 2)—a "continuous" (although not unchanging) idea of self: "Am I (?)/I am still like that." The photographs show, it appears, not only something that is still me in physical features, but also in character (which may indicate a particular narrative outlook). While *Past-present* is my main interpretive and sensual contemporary reaction to the school photographs, other responses to the images are possible. In fact, I have at least one other, but less strong, interpretive movement in time perspectives from my current experience to my earlier life, which the photographs stimulate and seem to represent: *Present-past*, a revival, a reflection, a retaining of self (see Table 2). So there is some "doubling", or movement to and fro between the time perspectives *Past-present* and *Present-past* when "re-viewing" my early life. *Present-past*, for example, was evident during a visit in 2009 to my village after a gap of nearly twenty years. I was recognising that what I was experiencing "now" was located "then". I felt "at home" and that it was still "my village" as it was then. The visit also included going inside my childhood home for the first time since I left it at the age of eight. My home and the village (the lanes, fields, church, and school) which formed the mundane, daily contours and horizons of my body, mind, and social relationships seemed to have a contemporary resonance—I felt a renewed sense of "belonging": "I am what I was then." A reaction seemed to be emerging that was

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increasing on the "convergence" (or greater technical and aesthetic interconnection) of "still" and "moving" images as developments in HD/SLR cameras, small computers, internet applications, smart phones, etc. (and by improvements in stills captured from video) are enabling the ready taking and dissemination of images (SMYTH & LAURENT, 2011).

less tempered with feelings about what had disappeared or changed in the village. On the few previous visits (maybe half a dozen), my reaction had included a feeling of loss, emphasising what was different, with my response primarily to the physical changes in the village (and so perhaps indicating *Past-past*)—I now had a renewed sense of personal attachment.<sup>11</sup> [29]

The type of life connections I perceive as joining my autobiographical experiences between then and now, are "inner" rather than "outer". Of course, there were family, school, and other influences that provided context and interacted with my emerging sense of self. As a child I had a strong personal motivation to understand my surroundings, to learn, to discover, to expand my knowledge and explore my senses/consciousness. Later, there were improving family circumstances and fortuitous educational opportunities that became available to me which allowed openings for my inner desire to learn. Onto my motivation to gain knowledge and social understanding was later coupled a strong political outlook when just a teenager, not only to know about the world but to change it, and a quest for recognition I saw in combined personal and family/class terms. Even so, there is still a certain puzzle to me when looking at the two school photographs, despite holding a (primarily) clear *Past-present* time perspective, about my "journey" to academic achievement. [30]

In narrative outlook my mood shifts, on occasion, between some sense of loss (*Past-past*), in the passing of the "village idyll" of childhood, to contemplation of my "success" (academic achievement and prosperity) and my origins in a "lower" social class background (*Present-past*). I feel that this is not a simple "happily ever after" story; in mythical/metaphoric summary I see my life in terms of "borders" that had to be negotiated to reach new ground. There were challenges and setbacks that had to be overcome and psychic legacies were left by traversing class and academic boundaries. But a mystery is still apparent to me in viewing my school photographs, which is reflected in my dominant *Past-present* time perspective—"Was(?)/I was what I am now?" So, "How did I take the life trajectory I did?"; "What propelled me?" (ROBERTS, 1998) "How may the boy of six to eight years old be linked to the man in his 61st year?" "The boy becomes the man, but is the man still the boy?" [31]

## **6. Today: My Contemporary Context of "Seeing and Feeling"—"Life as/as if a Dream"**

We view photographs of ourselves from the present, while they are from the past we are responding to them in our current life. We do draw upon our memories but within our contemporary life, carrying, selecting, and re-working previous viewings and according to current concerns and expectations of the future (see Table 2). So, we move in consciousness and reflection, in memory, between time perspectives; even if one interpretation is more dominant in focus it interweaves with one or more others (to form various kinds of narrative trajectory [see

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11 Of course, memories of different aspects of our past—home, family, friendships, schooling, etc.—may evoke different time perspectives, even so, one will tend to be "dominant" at a given point in our lives or as we "remember".

ROBERTS, 2011]). To give "relevant" details of my *current* personal experience (mid 2010) which may well have considerable influence on how I now "read" the two school photographs, and an account of my life and memories since, in relation to the school photographs (e.g., how I have perceived them in the intervening period), would be an extremely exhaustive, complex reflexive task to perform. Our experiences and reflections are ongoing in life; our life conceptions (e.g. of self) are not necessarily consistent, coherent, or considered in depth at given points, and change over time. But at least some provisional account is possible; we *do* try to make sense of our lives, between "then" and "now", on a regular, even daily, basis to ourselves and others, with varying insight and evaluation. It seems in the last five years I have been going through a defining period, a shift in time perspective and self comparable to my life between six to eight years old. To put it rather differently, it appears that my current concerns (academic and non-academic) seem to *echo* the personal developments that were taking place then. I am again exploring sensual and intellectual abilities (in academic and non-academic life) and their connections—which has some comparison with the initial experiences and developments as a child (in sensual awareness, consciousness and self, and outlook on the social world). It is also possible I am shifting in main time perspective with emphasis gaining on *Present-past*, while *Past-present* is still in ascendant. Below I outline a number of autobiographical dimensions to my *contemporary* experience that appear to connect to my earlier personal development and stimulated by my understanding of the two school photographs and my surrounding memories. [32]

## 6.1 "Turns"

A succession of substantive and methodological "turns" (narrative, body, spatial, and temporal, etc.) has occurred in social science in the past twenty years or so. I have followed these turns and many have been reflected strongly in my academic work. However, I have increasingly become aware—especially in the last three or four years—how they have a "synergy" with my life experience, my own personal changes in self and social understanding. I have long been cognisant that, for example, my interest in biographical research has a personal reference, in part to make reflexive sense of my own life, as well as the lives of others (i.e. autobiographical in orientation, see ROBERTS, 2002, pp.73-92, 2007b) and I have also had a concern for the interrelation between the researcher's personal life and research practice. But these interests, reflecting sensitivity to the personal, the subjective or emotional, sensual, and experiential dimensions of the individual and how they are similarly applied both inside and outside research-academic life, appear to have become further sharpened in understanding. In general terms, perhaps I have recently undergone what might be considered my own personal, not merely academic, "turns". The academic concern with the ideas such as performance, emotional life, and visual/sensual experience and other abilities, and discussions of the relation between the social sciences and artistic practices (see ROBERTS, 2006, pp.139-142, 2008), has coincided with (and influenced) a reflection on my own aptitudes and their past development<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> For bringing our senses into (ethnographic) research, see SPARKES (2009), an article in which he includes three personalised vignettes from his life.

Here, there is a self-recognition of the mutuality between personal and academic issues. In short, the memories associated with the two school photographs of my emerging abilities as a child, and the personal and academic fascination with how our abilities develop, relate, and are applied, have taken on a personal contemporary relevance, or a to and fro movement between time perspectives, between the "now" and the past, my personal development at six to eight and my present life outlook and concerns. [33]

## 6.2 "The body" and "time"

I have begun to consider my physical changes more closely in the last five years. Being 60 last year I am part of the "'60s Generation" (starting university in 1968 and very involved in the student culture and protests at the time). As we grow older we have a changing sense of what our bodies can achieve, and more likelihood of particular stresses and incapacities. In my case, the onset of more aches and pains, including a period of sciatica treated by physiotherapy, and an expanding waistline prompted me to become a regular gym attendee, to have a personal trainer and become Pilates "convert". At the same time I have a growing interest in dance, performance and physical communication. I have become both more attuned to what I can do physically and what I can "recover" of past physical abilities (e.g. some former flexibility). Interestingly, I have found that my body seems to have a memory of what it once could do but longer can, or at least not to the same level. At the same time my thoughts have veered between my past physical performances at school (e.g. where I was very good at sports and gymnastics) and more realistic assessments of current capabilities. Through these physical activities I have a better understanding of my body; I have begun to consider more seriously how we can listen to, feel and see its movement, as well as touch and know it. I have begun to reflect more deeply on how the physical, sensual, and intellectual interact in the construction of self and well-being, and just how *limited* our academic conceptions of the self have been. [34]

## 6.3 "The visual" and "narrative"

A strong theme (again) in my academic work has been the interplay between the personal life of the researcher in investigation and particularly, in narrative/biographical research. In the past few years I have had time to reflect, more deeply than previously, on the personal life of the researcher (and write on the emotional and relational aspects of research practice, see ROBERTS, 2007b) and extend this interest to my more recent exploration of visual and sensual life dimensions and their interconnections in time/memory. My engagement in this work has run in parallel to and stimulated the archaeology of the development of my own abilities (e.g. aesthetic, performative, and intellectual). I have become more interested in how sensual and intellectual abilities have been formed and are applied and have developed within my own life experience generally, and more specifically reflected through my research work. For instance, I have been surprised by the extent to which I have some ability to interpret visual imagery, a talent that first unexpectedly appeared when attending a conference and a workshop on visual topics (painting and photography) relating to biography. I

found myself hardly able to wait to give my thoughts on the paintings and photographs presented by the speakers. This excitement reminds me of the "highs" I received by the processes of conceptualisation in writing my sociological postgraduate theses many years ago. In fact, I have not had the same degree of intellectual thrill in contemplating ideas and interpretation of materials since that period until now. This realisation has led me to a great personal/academic interest in photography—in analysis, usage, and history and in taking my own pictures. What was formerly only an occasional interest in taking an "artistic" picture (for example, a holiday scene) has turned to reading about and taking photographs as a central personal activity. I have also thought about the interrelation between my senses; for example, oddly, I have recently become aware of some possible synaesthesia, in that viewing certain colour hues appear to give me a metallic taste.<sup>13</sup> [35]

My emerging concern with the visual was somewhat prefigured by a new fascination in art and design during the last few years. I took an evening art class (doing drawing and painting) about six or seven years ago and I became fascinated with the life and work of KANDINSKY, and the diverse approaches of De Stijl, the Bauhaus and Surrealism. I have also become interested in art history, and an avid reader of the life and work of artists and photographers (e.g. KANDINSKY, CHAGALL, and CARTIER-BRESSON) and a very frequent attendee at exhibitions.<sup>14</sup> Reading history had been my favourite subject throughout school and remained important as both a leisure and academic pursuit, particularly biographies on the life and work of DARWIN and DICKENS, and to these now have been added biographies of artists. [36]

The decision to examine the two school photographs from my childhood must be very much related to my rising exploration of visual, sensual, and performative areas, and how they are implicated in the biography of the researcher, and how his/her self informs, often in comparable ways, the practices of both academic and non-academic life. At the same time, the recollections of childhood being

13 I am not sure the degree to which memory plays a role here (rather than synaesthesia), since the usual metallic taste I have is similar to that of "milk of magnesia" I was given as a child which came in a distinctive "deep blue" bottle. But certainly some "high", "saturated", sharp colours (as in many sea-landscape photographs by professionals and keen amateurs, often nowadays in HD) give me such a taste and sometimes an aversion.

14 For example, for KANDINSKY, see DUCHTING (2000), FISCHER and RAINBIRD (2006), GADDI and PETROVA (2009), WHITFORD (1999), WEISS (1995); for De Stijl, see FABRE and HOTTE (2009); for the Bauhaus (including photography), see BORCHARDT-HUME (2006), BAUHAUS ARCHIV and DROSTE (2002), WHITFORD (1984); for Surrealism (including photography), see ADES and BAKER (2006), ALEXANDRIAN (1970), ALISON (2010), ALLMER (2009), BATE (2004), BOUQUERET (2008), BURKE (2006), ELLIOTT (2010); HAWORTH-BOOTH (2007), HEITING (2008), LEVY and PIRSIG-MARSHALL (2009), MUNDAY (2001), WOOD (2007); more generally, for the avant-garde and photography across Central and Eastern Europe, see BURY (2007), MARGOLIN (1997), WITKOVSKY (2007). Interesting comparisons can be made between Surrealism and Futurism on the "image" of the self and "photo-performance" (and movement) (see KOZLOFF, 2007, pp.81-85; MUNDY 2001; LISTA, 2008). A central aspect of KANDINSKY, the Bauhaus, and De Stijl, I find particularly stimulating is how they worked and cooperated across (to "synthesise") the arts (and crafts and design) and, hence, it can be said, they sought to interrelate "the senses". For example, see the interplay between word and image, colour and sound/music, in KANDINSKY and MARC (2006) [1912]; see also DUCHTING, 2000; LINDSAY & VERGO, 1994). It is perhaps worth noting here DIAGHILEV's *Ballets Russes* and its similar interest to "unify" the arts, beginning around the same time, see PRITCHARD (2010).

undertaken it seems affect how I currently understand my academic research areas: memory, time, the senses, and consciousness. [37]

#### **6.4 "Emotion" and "character"**

My long consideration of the researcher's experience of research including the overlaps between personal life (family or other relationships and commitments) and academic life seems to have also become refined recently by reflection on the connections between memory and the emotions (ROBERTS, 2007b). Revisiting the two school photographs has made me consider not only my early emotional, intellectual, and social development but, also, to ask whether the pictures may in some way portray formative abilities or outlook, and consciousness of the social world that have remained. Are there similar patterns discernible between how I apply my sensual and intellectual abilities and generally approach life (family, academic/research and other relations, etc.) now and then? Does the outward "pose" in the photographs "betray" inner feelings, motivations, or formative approaches to the social world, taken through adolescence into adult life? Certainly, the exercise of looking and remembering "encouraged" by the photographs has led me to re-examine the "character traits" that inform both how I conduct my academic and private life. It seems to me now that I address research and my life more generally, in a similar manner: within processes of reflection, the excitements and doubts, inquiry and information gathering, decision making, and so on. Involvement in research, like any other part of life, utilises our sensual, emotional and intellectual capacities and is a social activity, as well as interconnected with the rest of life experiences (ROBERTS, 2007b). But is it really possible to discern from the two photographs the character of the boy *and* the man he was to become? [38]

Looking at the two photographs together, they appear to indicate two sides of my personality which have remained: the earlier photograph seems to depict a reserved, wary, defensive, determined individual who assesses situations and will overcome setbacks, while the second photograph shows a more performative character who seeks a response and recognition from others (and may sometimes do the unexpected). However, photographs, like a written text, have their limitations in giving a representation of character. Do aspects of personality really lie behind their possible indications on the surface portrait, waiting to be "decoded"? Or, is this interpretation of personality or character traits within the photographs merely a retrospective construction, subject to intervening and contemporary influences, personal concerns, joys, doubts, and anticipations? Or, could both be (probably) partly "true"? [39]

#### **6.5 "Consciousness", "feeling" and "dreaming"**

My exploration of the visual and the other senses over the past five years or so came mainly from leisure pursuits (painting classes and a photographic society) before feeding more fully into academic activities, including the interplay between personal life inside and outside research practices. In reflecting on my own life narrative, it seems that my contemporary fascination with movement, colour and

space has a possible parallel in my earlier childhood explorations of dreaming in colour and body-time-motion; a "re-envisioning" of my early development. In some way are those earlier childhood "experiments in consciousness" perhaps biographical templates, or precursors for my contemporary explorations in the senses and movement to which I have only recently become more fully attuned (ROBERTS, 2004a)? What are the links in memory here—voluntary and involuntary—between now and my life between six to eight years old? My contemporary outlook in life and activities appears to have influenced me in revisiting the two school photographs and engage in a connected archaeology of the senses/consciousness. On the other hand, the examination of the photographs seems to be "played back" into reflection on my current life and academic issues. There is then, apparently, a backwards-forwards movement in *time and consciousness*—in time perspectives—between childhood development and contemporary reflection. [40]

My current activity in visual areas (academic and non-academic), especially photography (in taking pictures and in research), has strong themes of form, colour, time, narrative and *consciousness*. In fact, the photographs I like to take tend towards the surreal in inspiration; often they are high in colour or have (I am told) an "observational quirkiness" (in humour, unusual perspective, and use surface reflections, etc.) (c.f. MEREDITH, 2009; BOHM, 2010) or give central attention to strong form and shadow. Although I am very interested in documentary street photography (see ROBERTS, 2011) it is the more surprising in the everyday, in the unreal in the real, the multi-real", and the "hyper-real", the "surreal" elements of life that most appeals to me in the photographs I take and those by others.<sup>15</sup> Most of all, it is photographs that have a dream-like quality or, rather, lie between reality and dreaming, fact and fiction, or have a referent but also very much in-themselves, that attract me, since they "disturb" taken-for-granted social expectations or "suggest" narratives. It is images that depict life as "caught" (or moving) between states of being, between forms of consciousness, between notions of time, half-memories, reality and fantasy, which spurs my imagination and excites me in taking my own photographs. Putting it a little differently, and more broadly, to me photographs (at least those that stimulate my appreciative and interpretive faculties) appear to give a conception of life as experienced through movement within a range or different forms of consciousness. They suggest that our autobiographical narrative is necessarily incomplete, and has its origins in various forms of experience as within our current introspection, in retrospection—in memory, but also in prospection (what can/may be). The photograph, while a material "fact" and has a reference to a reality (a person, a scene, etc.), migrates in meaning between these states of consciousness as conceived through time. At its simplest, the photograph can

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15 "Street photography", initially associated with WINOGRAND and others in the 1960s and 1970s (but has a longer history back to CARTIER-BRESSON and earlier), like other "photographic genres" is an unstable entity, containing different and changing tendencies (e.g. in relation to the subject and viewer); for a critical appraisal of recent work see FRIED (2008, pp.235-259), and HOWARTH and McLAREN (2010). An exhibition on the history and development of "London Street Photography, is currently being held (during 2011) at the Museum of London (see: <http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/London-Wall/Whats-on/Exhibitions-Displays/London-Street-Photography/> [Accessed 4/23/11]; SEABORNE & SPARHAM [2011]).



have a dream like quality, just as life itself takes on aspects of a dream, as DICKENS described: "I think what a dream we live in, until it seems for the moment the saddest dream that ever was dreamed" (quoted in ACKROYD, 1991, p.379; see also ACKROYD, 2002, p.53; ROBERTS, 1996; SMITH, 2003, p.2). [41]

We often feel that we drift in mood, or are stimulated by involuntary and voluntary thoughts, memories and sensations as we traverse between and within states of consciousness, some of which appear dream-like.<sup>16</sup> Looking at photographic images of self (at least, for me) raises the possibility of, or induces, these mood shifts within time perspectives; for instance, we may even be engrossed in contemplating the image caught by thoughts around a particular memory (a scene, a conversation, a sound), and then back to a self-awareness of the act of looking, or engage in life as fantasy ("What if"), flowing between the past, present, and future and thoughts of alternative lives. It is the passage between, or step from and to, the two school photographs and my current life that is personally intriguing—in how we contemplate our past while seeking to make its connection with the now. [42]

## 7. Conclusions

The above discussion cannot claim to be more than a very preliminary exploration of how we form understandings of old photographs of ourselves and how these visual images may help to uncover, by an archaeology through the imagination (subject to the important vicissitudes of memory), our personal development of the senses, feelings, and intellect—consciousness. Such an investigation raises issues for biographical/narrative analysis and, more generally, qualitative research, regarding our aesthetic and other abilities as social researchers, and the interrelations between our research and the arts, and also knowledge from the sciences (i.e. development of perception, and workings of memory). The "re-visualisation" of the photographic image (portrait/self-portrait) when we see it again, is more than simply a re-appraisal of elements of a particular picture ("how we looked then") but is intimately part of a personal history-making (our self-image and how we wish to be portrayed and perceived). Seeing a self-image is implicated in self-formation, in which we use the visual and other sensual dimensions and emotional feelings. [43]

Maybe the common and contested notion of the photograph as a "mirror" is associated with a rather deeper issue than that of realistic reflection. The act of looking at the portrait can produce a heightened awareness, sometimes intentionally, sometimes by surprise, and a possible sensitisation to the operation of consciousness: as we behold our image, the image stares back at us. This aspect is expanded further when the photograph is taken as akin to a "window", "veil", "gauze", etc. (see ROBERTS, 2011). The fascination of the photograph is that it is at once merely a material object with a flat surface and yet it shows another time and reality. Personal reflection on the picture can give a questioning, even disconcerting, entrance to what seems to be the inner self, by allowing

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16 David MATZA (1964) uses the term "drift" in relation to shifting moods in his classic discussion of delinquency.

passage through its "permeable membrane". We may begin to realise, or rather be reminded, that there are a range of states of consciousness other than the "now" of looking. We can become aware, however transitorily, that within our everyday routines we move between forms of consciousness and occasional thoughts on alternative lives or multiple states, as we may inquire: Who is that person? What is that person? Is it me? What is it to recognise ourselves? (See COHEN & TAYLOR, 1978.) [44]

When we obtain biographical-narrative accounts from respondents, usually the range of sensual and personal development is restricted or only fragmentarily given, perhaps due to a focus around certain (usually chronological) incidents or issues in a life. It is interesting that individuals' associations with images, sounds, smells, touch, are not explored or revealed as much as they might in biographical/narrative research. Sensual areas have been raised, but often tangentially or secondarily, as when research has been concerned with some major turning points in life (such as a serious illness). For instance, even though we often recognise pieces of music as associated with significant memories, our musical experience and its association with life events, is probably relatively under-investigated in biographical/narrative research.<sup>17</sup> It could also be said that inner life (and inner/outer relations) in terms of our various senses (not only images and sounds, but taste, touch, and smell), shifts in mood or of consciousness, and the role of fantasy, have not been given sufficient attention. Maybe, the response expected from the interview format or topic and /or the familiarity with other kinds of interview in the wider culture have a bearing. Or, that other aspects of the life are seen as more crucial as markers for framing the "story", such as changes in education, job, health, relationships, or family events. For these various reasons, we have not thought in sufficient detail about how the sensual-perceptual capacities and individual outlook emerge, are employed and are connected within intellectual and personal change (for participants, and for us in our lives as researchers in and outside investigations). However, a major shift has been underway in more sophisticated qualitative research, as in work which links ethnography and biography, and includes participants' artistic expression, and meanings associated with objects (see, for example, O'NEILL, 2008). [45]

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17 See RIESSMAN (2008, pp.99, 211) for an example of a song lyric used in a narrative interview. There is the common expression that life has a "sound track" or favourite pieces of music as associated with important events, relationships (e.g., love affairs), and are played to recreate a time and mood. Music can also be associated with individual and group identity formation, see ROBERTS (2010a). I remember playground songs from the ages six to eight and, by the age of ten, various pop songs (e.g. by ELVIS PRESLEY) being sung by myself and other children at school around 1960. As an adolescent, when the BEATLES arrived, I became an avid fan and still play '60s (or '60s "style") rock and pop every day, for instance, when writing or driving in the car. Perhaps within "thematic analysis" (see RIESSMAN, 2008, pp.53-76) interview questions (and probes, prompts, etc.) could be devised that elicit material more specifically on sensual experiences as themes (e.g., music, pictures, smells, touch). "Biography" can be constructed in numerous ways—even according to interconnected themes. For instance, ACKROYD (2000) constructs a "biography" of London—according to themes such as crime, rivers, night and day, rather than as a straightforwardly linear, historical account. He says London is a "body" that "defies chronology", with many "different forms of time", it is like a "labyrinth" (c.f. BENJAMIN, 1999, p.429). Geoff DYER (2007) constructs an extremely insightful account of photography via a range of themes, such as hands, doors, fences, benches, bed, etc. in the work of major photographers.

Relatively little it seems has been written by established researchers about their general intellectual and emotional/sensual life and development—and how these have related to research practice, even allowing for the extensive auto-ethnographic literature and discussion of reflexivity (see ROBERTS, 2007b). Most commonly, there are some contributions to "how to books" on study skills for undergraduate students and guides giving tips (often from the author's own experience) for postgraduate students on how to research and complete a PhD. A return to MILLS's "sociological imagination" is perhaps required. That is, understanding the connections between biography, the social and historical by an *intimate awareness* that includes how our intellectual and sensual development and capabilities interweave and, thereby, we can enhance our perception and understanding of ourselves *and* the social world (MILLS, 1970). In fact, issues surrounding our personal qualities, as qualitative researchers, are now coming to the fore as social scientists reach out towards the arts (e.g. the performative, expressive, appreciative, and communicative dimensions of life) and explore the possibilities of artistic practices (in traditional and also more recent arts, e.g. new media) in relation to research work (see ROBERTS, 2008). [46]

In utilising photographs for qualitative social research purposes, there is the need to draw not only on various perspectives and methodologies across the social sciences, but also crucial points of contact with the arts. In relation to examining photographic self-portraits, taken by researcher or research participant of themselves, how artists and critics have addressed relevant issues such as pose, self and identity, issues of realism, and portrayal of the social world, are highly relevant (see ROBERTS, 2011). For instance, comparisons with the self-portrait work of the artist can be fruitful, by highlighting such issues as motivation: "The self-portrait is the artist's most personal form of expression. It is the ultimate means of self-analysis, presenting an opportunity for self-reflection, self-expression and self-promotion: a bid for eternity" (RIDEAL, 2005, p.7; see CUMMING, 2009, pp.58-79). [47]

The "re-view" of my two school photographs and associated memories concerning how I was gaining more sensual and intellectual sophistication and understanding of the social world demonstrates, I believe, how the visual relates to other sensual and emotional experiences, albeit (in this case) through memory. This archaeology has also been part of my current self reflection at a moment in my life, perhaps when I am realising the presence of latent or previously under-perceived abilities, such as in the interpretation of images and in taking photographs. This direction has also resulted from a rising interest (shared by other social science researchers) in artistic fields, and connected to more time to reflect due to my release from formal academic commitments, and sensitiveness to the aging process. My various concerns in visual, perceptual, and performative, emotional areas have been forged together across my life activities.<sup>18</sup> I am now able to see more clearly how questions of personal life (e.g.

<sup>18</sup> Georg SIMMEL in his well known article "The Adventure" (1911, see WOLFF, 1959) makes the link between older age and an historical outlook—in contrast with concentration on the present and romantic outlook of youth. He describes the "adventurer" as living in the present without a historical view; thus, it seems linking "types"—adventurer, lover, artist, gambler and activities, to time outlook. Interestingly, he argues that an adventure becomes like a dream in memory.

family, friendships) and academic pursuits are intimately connected. I now realise that there are specific similarities between how I engage in research practice and approach broader social relationships, in terms, for instance, of orientation or principles, perceptions, skills, and emotions applied. Like other sociologists, in my career I was very largely wedded to the text for the dissemination of my ideas with little, if any, attention to other modes of expression (visual, performative) or to emotional/affective life.<sup>19</sup> After, over forty years' practice of sociology, MILLS' injunction to connect biography, structure and history appears ever more pertinent.<sup>20</sup> Within this tripartite relation must be located biographical attention to the visual, the other senses and consciousness. [48]

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Alternatively, we could argue, perhaps the life of the adventurer—including the photographer as an artist—could be seen in terms of time perspectives more broadly, and not just the present; and the taking of a photograph as a "creation of dreams"—being the adventure. Some comparison has been made between the street photographer and the *flâneur* (c.f. BAUDELAIRE), sauntering around the city, by commentators on photography (c.f. SONTAG, 1977; GAUTRAND, 2003). It is worth noting that, at least for BENJAMIN, it is "the city as the realisation of that ancient dream of humanity, the labyrinth" (n.b. ACKROYD above on London, Footnote 17) that is the "reality" to which the *flâneur*, "without knowing it" is devoted, rather than the "study" of people's appearances to "discover" their background, "character and destiny" (BENJAMIN, 1999, pp.429-430).

- 19 For a discussion of the relation between text and image, see ROBERTS (2011) and also FINNEGAN (2002, pp.229-235) on the interconnection between writing/reading/verbal and visual—and touch, smell—forms of experience and communication. We must not forget that writing, both factual and fictional, can be "visual" in summoning up imagery of scenes, faces, objects, and ongoing interaction via description, rhetorical devices, plot, and so on. For instance, the novels and other writings (journalism, letters, etc.) of DICKENS are famous examples of the use of visual imagery. Interestingly, SMITH (2003) argues that DICKENS's works can be considered "proto-filmic" in language and structure—an anticipation or "dream" of the cinema, in portraying the city (showing the influences of visual entertainments, not merely theatre but also the "panorama", "magic lantern", etc. and his interest in railway travel). DICKENS's novels were illustrated by Hablot BROWNE ("PHIZ") (see LESTER, 2004) and others; there are complex connections between the various kinds of illustrations and the text of his novels—both in relation to their performance in the theatre and in his own public readings (see PATTEN, 1999, pp. 292-293). There was also an intricate intertwining between DICKENS's personal life and relationships and with (and between) his very extensive public activities (e.g. speeches), journalism, travel writing, letters, etc. (see SLATER, 2011). If words can summon up the visual, we also understand the "visual" (to some extent) by association between image and forms of description, narrative, etc. "Photobiography" (and "photoautobiography") may be used to describe works (life stories, diaries, letters, etc.) in which photographs are given a central importance, conversely "textual portraiture" (in fiction and literary autobiography and biography) can allude to texts that describe the face/body/person with or without reference to submitted photographic or other images. Of course, these are necessarily rather open definitions (see ARRIBERT-NARCE, 2008; PAWLIKOWSKA, 2009; HUGHES & NOBLE, 2003). Also, of relevance here are the photo book and photo magazine, including the photo essay or photo story covering social and war reportage, c.f. the classic work of Eugene SMITH (for *Life*), and Gerda TARO and Robert CAPA (on the Spanish Civil War) (see ROBERTS, 2011 and also CURTIS, 2011; MORA & HILL, 1998; SCHABER et al., 2007; WHELAN, 2007; YOUNG & BALSELLS, 2010).
- 20 "40 years' practice of sociology": Becoming a student in 1968 (the year of "student revolt") I completed an undergraduate degree in social science in 1971, and took a Masters in criminology and then a PhD in sociology. As a postgraduate I became associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, UK working with its Director, Stuart HALL (see HALL & JEFFERSON, 2006 [1976] or CLARKE et al., 1979; HALL, CLARKE, CRITCHER, JEFFERSON & ROBERTS, 1978). After teaching and research full time at two universities from 1976 until 2005, I then became a research Professor (in Border Studies and later, in Biographical and Community Research) and three years ago a Visiting Professor in Psychosocial Research (see ROBERTS, 2002, 2006, 2007b, 2008). My interest in life story/history began in my undergraduate and postgraduate studies in deviancy theory and the Chicago School—including THOMAS & ZNANIECKI's (1918-20) study of the "Polish peasant", which is still relevant as one of the most sophisticated (and certainly extensive) attempts to interconnect biography, structure/culture and history (see ROBERTS, 2010b).

The autobiographical narration of the self, including through our relation to portrait photographs, is undertaken within the experience and interpretation of our time perspectives; multiple selves are constructed—the secret or public, the real and the fictive, the past and the alternative selves—through which emotions (love, hate, fear, anxiety) are created and lived (see ROBERTS, 1996, 2002, pp.66-71). Past selves are re-lived, re-visualised, and revised; future selves are "re-hearsed"—thought about and pictured in action. Through retrospection we cast back, through circumspection we revise, through modified repetition we re-apply in the new situation: "The temporal structure of everyday life confronts me as a facticity with which I must reckon, that is, with which I must try to synchronise my own projects" (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 1971, p.41). [49]

Photographs of "our-selves" routinely form part of this retrospection, prospection and re-creation—the "re-view of self" is "stimulated" by photographic images through processes of looking and relooking. Memory and time are intertwined as the past self (or selves) is reconstituted through interpretive visual and other sensual "imaginings" (FREEMAN, 1993). Therefore, our self is re-formed through the processes of recollection and interpretation "in which we survey and explore our own histories, toward the end of making and remaking a sense of whom and what we are" (p.6). But,

"What, though, are the implications of this perspective? Is life historical knowledge essentially retrospective? Or is it more appropriately formulated 'prospectively', with what happens earlier determining, with the inexorability of fate itself, what later will be? Could it be both? It could indeed ..." (p.23). [50]

The two school photographs still leave me with such autobiographical questions: Am I still the boy aged six to eight years old, or is the man in his 61st year, the boy? How was I "caught" (by the camera)—and how can I "recapture" (my past) (c.f. AGEE & EVANS, 2006 [1941], pp.72, 81)? [51]

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