Framing identity: social practices of photography in Canada (1880-1920)

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SELF AND OTHER

IN SEMIOTIC TERMS, photography has an indexical as well as an iconic status (Barthes 1981). This gives the photograph a “causal relation to its referent, as with footprints or X-rays” (Solomon-Godeau 1992: 327). Such indexicality contributes to the assumption of truth being embedded within the photograph and further, that this truth speaks with objectivity. It is this indexical nature that allows for the distancing objectification and classification of the subject photographed, a characteristic that has made photography particularly useful in the establishment of a number of the hegemonic devices of colonialism. Because both in its application and results, photography is inherently an “othering” process, almost from its inception it has been a powerful weapon in the colonial arsenal. It has thus had a significant effect upon the understanding of colonized peoples.

Due to its association with anthropology and the illusion it gives of providing only a disinterested, factual record, the supposedly value-free, documentary genre known as ethnographic photography has been particularly influential. Not surprisingly, in the last two decades this aspect of photographic practice has become the subject of much critical analysis.¹ Post-colonial writers such as Gayatri Spivak (1988) have shown that minority groups seldom have much control over the way they are represented, which, given time and distance, leads inevitably to subaltern groups being viewed as a primitive or exotic other. In a similar vein, Johannes Fabian has argued that anthropology has used time and the denying of time to the other to “constitute its own object — the savage, the primitive, the other” (1983: 1).

Apart from the obvious use of such imagery to establish an appropriate hierarchical

relationship between colonizer and colonized, as Liz Wells points out, Western culture also used these constructed understandings as a definitional strategy, positioning itself against “the other” of colonized peoples and thereby defining itself as hegemonic by implication (1997: 59). Edward Said describes this process in relation to the Orient, writing, “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (1979: 3). Relating this to photography, historian Daniel Francis contends that at the end of the nineteenth century, the photographing of Native people was part of a strategy to invent a new identity for Euro-Canadians. He writes, “The image of the Other, the Indian was integral to this process of self identification. The Other came to stand for everything the Euro-Canadian was not” (1992: 8).

In this chapter I explore the relationship between self and other, using as subject the photographing of a colonized group of Indigenous peoples by Geraldine Moodie (1854-1945) a white, Euro-Canadian woman, hence herself simultaneously a representative of both other and self. The focus of my analysis is a body of photographs of Inuit taken by Moodie between 1904 and 1909 in what is now the Canadian territory of Nunavut. Moodie was a professional photographer who from 1895 to 1898 operated three studios in the Canadian West. Her marriage to a North West Mounted Police (NWMP) officer, John Douglas (J.D.) Moodie, both enhanced her already privileged, upper-middle-class status and gave her access to the North on government ships. Moodie accompanied her partner on official NWMP trips into the North in 1904 and again between 1906-09. She was the first white woman to photograph in the Canadian Arctic and made numerous portraits of Inuit. As might be expected, given her background and experience, stylistically many of Moodie’s images derive from studio portraiture, “a narrative distinct from, but closely linked to the male world of expedition photography” (King and Lidchi 1998: 15). Moodie set an improvised Northern studio where she made a series of compelling portraits of Inuit.

I will read a selection of Moodie’s Arctic images and relate these readings to the discussion of how photography as a social practice serves women in the establishment of their identity. While some women photographers, like Mattie Gunterman, created their identity by contextualizing themselves within a family narrative, others did so not by turning their cameras upon themselves, but rather, by photographing others or, in the case of Geraldine Moodie, by photographing the Other.

Moodie’s known oeuvre consists of approximately 95 photographs in the Museum of Mankind in London, England; 62 photographs in the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa, Ontario; 48 photographs in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Museum in Regina, Saskatchewan and 14 photographs in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Archives in Ottawa. As well, Moodie photographs are held in the collections of the Glenbow and Medicine Hat Museums in Alberta, the Maple Creek Museum in Saskatchewan and by her family. The majority are photographs of Native people, primarily portraits of Inuit made in the Canadian Arctic.  

2 Geraldine married a second cousin with the same last name and therefore did not change her surname as was the custom in the time.


5 See Close (1995). I chose to focus on Moodie’s photographs of a Plains Cree Thirst Dance made in Battleford, North West Territories in 1895 in my Master’s thesis. The selection of seven representative Moodie photographs of the Thirst Dance includes six from the National Archives of Canada (C. Wentworth Bagley Collection 1942-037 and the Canada Patent and Copyright Office 1966-094) and one from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Museum in Regina, Saskatchewan (Geraldine Moodie Collection).
Unfortunately, Geraldine Moodie left no written account as to why she chose Indigenous peoples as subjects. While it is possible that as the photographer spouse of a NWMP officer posted to the far North, the resident Native people were no more than interesting, available subjects, there is every indication that she recognized their potential to draw attention to her work and thus further her career. First, she was certainly aware of the European and Euro-American interest in the seeming exoticism of other cultures. This is evidenced by her practice of depositing her images of Native people with relevant, high profile institutions such as the British Museum and in Canada, “official bodies concerned with Canadian and Indian affairs” (Rosenblum 1984: 111). We know too that she obtained copyright for those of her images she considered most significant and that of the ones she sought to protect in this way, many were her portraits of Native people. Clearly, as a commercial photographer, she knew that there was a potentially lucrative market for these photographs and she wished to insure that it would be she who would profit from their publication. As far as can be determined, Moodie was the only woman photographer in Canada during this period to hold a copyright on her work. Moodie was clearly an ambitious woman who saw in her Inuit portraits a unique opportunity to raise her profile and advance her career as a professional photographer.

In Chapter Four I will examine Moodie’s work in relation to that of her contemporaries, so-called “shadow catchers,” a coterie of almost exclusively male photographers who photographed Native peoples. I will also compare her images to those of several women photographers including Gertrude Kasebier. Kasebier’s popular mother-child portraits are discussed in this chapter as a point of comparison to Moodie’s.

As a professional woman photographer working in the Canadian West and Eastern Arctic between the years 1895 to 1916, Moodie was a rarity (Lippard 1992: 13, Silversides 1994: 3), since there were only a few other professional women photographers working at that time in Western Canada. Of these, only one, Hannah Maynard (1834-1918), also photographed Native people. However, for her, this seems to have been no more than a passing interest, since almost all of her small number of portraits of First Nations people were made in her British Columbia studio. Unlike Geraldine Moodie and her male counterparts, Maynard did not venture into the field to produce a large body of work on the subject (Watson 1992: 2). Moodie is the only early twentieth-century, Canadian woman photographer whose images of Native people suggest an indirect representation of the self-other dynamic.

Although both men and women photographed Native people, as Lucy Lippard suggests, their images differ, with those made by women displaying a recognizably greater degree of empathy toward their subjects. Lippard has also noted that portraits made by women tend to be “less grim” and more “eye-to-eye” than those made by men (38). In the chapter that follows, I analyze how Geraldine Moodie’s images of Native people, particularly those showing family relationships, differed from those made by her male contemporaries.
My study is informed by the model of cross-cultural analysis of visual images set out by Mieke Bal in her book *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*. Bal is critical of the manner in which some post-colonial critics work with visual materials. She calls for a “de-distancing” or removing of false distance in order to analyze images from the colonial past in a politically responsible and intellectually effective manner. In the conclusion to her chapter “A Postcard from the Edge,” Bal lists the minimal conditions that should be included in the analysis of visual images in a critical photo essay. As these suggestions are key to my study, I will quote them at length:

*First feature: the subject of exposing is the critic. This is visible in the material presentation. This feature necessitates not only an endorsement of the problematic relation between dominating text and subjected, selected images, but also an explicit showing of how images become a text that the exposing agent “writes.” Second feature: the expository agent provides a thoughtful display, making mostly sparse use of visual material where every image is provided with an immediately accessible critique which justifies its use with specificity. Third feature: such analyses constantly thematize not the represented object which is only too easily passed off as “true,” “authentic,” or “erotic,” but the subject looking at the image, and what that subject is doing there. In such a perspective, each image has its own critical viewers within it, and the expository agent draws attention to this internal viewer. Fourth feature: a critical analysis that involves the critic makes explicit the narrative dimension of the images. Fifth feature: the subgenre exposes postcards returned to the sender; the look of the colonized cast upon the colonizer” (1996: 220).*

Bal calls for a responsible critical analysis that takes into account the significance of the viewpoint of the critic, who is the expository agent. Unavoidably, as the agent of display, the critic becomes an editor of the photographer’s images and, more importantly, in part gains control of their embedded messages. In selecting and arranging the images to be read, the critic effectively “writes” a narrative through the words or images of another. Thus, by selecting a few of Moodie’s photographs for my study, I become the agent of their display and must heed the warning inherent in Bal’s question: “Doesn’t one repeat the gesture of appropriation and exploitation one seeks to criticize, if one reprints as quotations the very material whose use by predecessors is subject to its criticism?” (197). This question will be discussed further in this chapter when I shall provide as evidence examples of photographs that objectify their Native subjects.

**Fulberton Harbour Madonna**

My fascination with Moodie’s Inuit portraits began with a single photograph that I first saw in *Private Realms of Light*, a 1983 exhibition of early Canadian photographs at the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa. What struck me initially was not so much its subject, an intimate portrait of a mother and child holding hands and exchanging glances,
but its simultaneous and unsettling sense of inherent familiarity and strangeness. The photograph, entitled by Moodie, *Eskimo Woman Wearing Beaded Deerskin Dress Made for Lady Grey*, 1906 (Fig. 2.1), shows a young, Inuk mother in an elaborately beaded attiqi or parka holding the hand of a small child. In contrast, the child is naked except for a delicate string of beads or bones worn around her neck. Both ignore the camera, instead looking directly and affectionately into each other’s eyes. The child’s look is skeptical, perhaps uncomprehending, perhaps a little anxious, focused completely upon her mother, who smiles back reassuringly. The gaze is both powerful and arresting — an intimate exchange that reveals an extraordinary communication between two individuals. For a moment, through a single, shared glance, the public act of the studio portrait is made private.

In looking at this image, I cannot help but be reminded of Kaja Silverman’s reference to the commentator of Harun Farocki’s film, *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges*, who comments, “When one looks into the face of an intimate, one also brings something of a shared past. The photograph captures the moment and thus crops away the past and future” (1996: 148). Whereas the presence of a cross-cultural dynamic in Moodie’s image makes me reluctant to apply this idea too literally, it seems incontrovertible that at some level the photograph does succeed in revealing just such a shared moment, albeit a shared moment constructed from a strategic pose that clearly romanticizes both the Inuit other and the depiction of the parent–child bond. Which, of course, is exactly what all of Moodie’s experience had taught her to do. As a studio photographer in southern Canada, her commercial success had been largely dependent upon producing photographs with precisely these characteristics. By taking these photographs home and inserting them into photograph albums, she contextualizes each of her subjects within a particular family narrative, effectively creating a unique identity.

Even though the facilities available to Moodie in the Arctic were makeshift at best and her subjects were for her undeniably exotic, the parameters governing her approach to portraiture remained virtually unchanged. Whether intended by her or not, what one sees in this image is on one level a straightforward family album portrait of a mother and child. And, both because the parent–child relationship is so universal and because of the assumptions we make about such images, the effect, inevitably, is to make Inuit appear “more like us.” At the same time, however, a disjuncture of expectation results from their appearance and dress and because in Moodie’s time, the subjects are people who were most commonly photographed by ethnographers or anthropologists seeking only to illustrate specimens or exemplary types.

Marianne Hirsch argues that the appeal of photographs of the other, such as many that were included in Edward Steichen’s enormously influential 1955 exhibition, *Family of Man*, lay in the notion that the family can be used as a primary instrument of universalization (1997: 50). In her chapter “Reframing the Human Family Romance,” Hirsch cites Alan Sekula’s comments on Steichen’s exhibition in which Sekula suggests that the
exhibition proposed “a globalized, utopian family album, a family romance imposed on every corner of the earth” (51). Hirsch also argues that some of the images in Steichen’s exhibition are more like conventional familial snapshots, while others are closer to ethnographic or documentary photography. Although made long before most of the Family of Man photographs, the Moodie image described above is remarkable for the balance it achieves between these two genres. On the one hand, the photograph’s plain background, non-white subjects and exotic costuming could make it appear to be just one more colonialist, ethnographic record; on the other though, the revealed intimacy of relationship between parent and child moves the narrative to a rather more elevated plane, accomplishing nothing less than a humanization of the other. It is this reference to what Hirsch has termed the familial gaze that makes this Inuk mother and child more universally accessible and popular. This quality of a “family romance” is present in many of Moodie’s Inuit portraits. She uses sentimental poses, such as hand holding, to highlight the familial relationship present in her frame. Moodie’s images strike a balance between being photographs that function as a form of visual anthropology, documenting the physical appearance and costume of Inuit as exotic other and being more aesthetic portraits that express human relationships.

This balance is the result this photograph’s spontaneous, informal quality. It stands apart from the formal portraits more common to the period in which it was made. The image has a snapshot quality, in part because the little girl was moving during the exposure; she has placed one foot behind the other, and her face and hands are blurred. At the time of its making, evidence in a studio portrait such as this of a subject moving would have been considered an error, and the image most likely would have been discarded. Instead, a hundred years later it serves to de-distance the image from its historic context. It is unusual that a professional photographer like Moodie would have printed and copyrighted such an image.

FIGURE 2.1
Eskimo Woman Wearing Beaded Deerskin Dress Made for Lady Grey, 1906, gelatin silver print, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Museum, Regina, 34.6.62

8 See Hirsch (1997: 53) for a discussion of the familial gaze in relation to the other.
It is also odd that the child is naked while her mother is clothed. Did the child undress because her mother was changing into a costume? Was it the heat of the photographer’s studio that prompted her to shed her clothing? Was she instructed to undress by the photographer and, if so, why? Formal studio portraits like this did not normally feature the subjects disrobed, unless they were meant as erotica or featured Native peoples. It was common during this period, for example, to show Native women partially clad with breasts exposed, often a sign of colonial dominance of the male photographer who makes images that combine erotic and aesthetic judgments. Bal refers to the aesthetics that inform such images as “aestherotics” (1996:212). However, the inclusion of a naked child is atypical. Certainly, this would not normally be seen in studio portraits of non-Native children, and where exceptions exist, they are generally images in which children are used as signifiers of innocence or sentimentality. The nineteenth-century English photographer Julia Margaret Cameron made some of the best-known examples. Cameron made allegorical, narrative images in which naked children with paper wings attached to their shoulders played the role of cupids. Christopher Wright makes an interesting observation about these nude studies of children, asking whether we are less suspicious of the intent if the photographs are made by women (2003:160). This is an important question to keep in mind as the analysis of this image continues.

The child’s nakedness is evidence of the degree of control Moodie exercised over the image. Visually, the nude child is spectacular, a dramatic contrast to her elaborately costumed mother. Undoubtedly Moodie was aware that for viewers brought up in a Christian tradition, the child would function symbolically as a putto or Christ child figure, making the young Inuit mother into a kind of exotic Madonna. Madonna and child imagery is, of course, common throughout the history of Western art, and the startling contrast in
Moodie’s image between the familiarity of its form and the exotic particularity of its content would have added greatly to the photograph’s commercial appeal. That Moodie was well aware of this is validated by a discovery made in a catalogue raisonné of Moodie’s photographs. This catalogue includes two, almost identical photographs of the same subject, obviously made during the same session: the original mother child portrait and another, slightly different version of the same image (Fig. 2.2).10

It seems that Moodie made several versions of same pose in search of the most desirable end product. In White’s biography, the two images are reproduced side by side with a different title, *Geraldine Moodie’s companion with the whaling name “Susie” in her beaded amautiq with her small child, Fullerton Harbour, 1904-5.* The second photograph opens up many more issues, but first a visual reading of the image is required. The subjects in this second photograph duplicate the pose of the other version almost exactly. What has changed is that the mother figure, now identified as “Susie,” is wearing a slightly different parka and the child is now clothed. The little girl is wearing a long fur jacket with a beaded hood and mukluks on her feet. Now she stands still, the image exhibiting none of the motion present previously. Her mother is once again attired in a richly ornate, traditional parka. It is, as has been noted earlier, a different parka, yet her hairstyle and hair ornaments remain the same. The facial expressions and shared gaze also echo the first version. Both mother and child are standing in a conventional, nineteenth or early twentieth-century studio pose; their feet are close together and they hold hands while exchanging looks.

There can be no doubt that the photographer carefully posed her subjects in order to repeat this image. Moodie was aware that this was a significant pose and took care to have several different versions of it. It is pointless to speculate whether or not the photographs were taken to be included with the gift of the parka to Lady Grey. However, as Moodie marked her copyright on both of them, it is apparent that she was aware of their currency as a collectable. From my perspective, the second image is less successful. Lacking the blurred movement recorded in the first, it seems to have been more rigidly controlled, making the posing more evident and the figures appear more stiff and formal. This image is less about the human relationships and more about the costumes worn by the subjects. It is more of an ethnographic study.

The discovery of a second version of one of Moodie’s portraits reminded me that these images are constructed in the studio. As is the case with all the photographs discussed in this study, it is important to remember that in all cases it is the photographer’s vision I am reading. To borrow from Bal’s version of the concept of focalization, the photographers act as external, narrator focalizer of their images.12 Bal replaces the idea of “perspective” or “point of view” with focalization, which allows for the distinction between “who sees” and “who speaks” (2001: 262). It is Moodie’s role in this process of focalization that fascinates me. Again the question of the gender of the photographer plays a significant role. Does her perspective as a woman, another marginalized other, make her representation of her...
Inuk subjects different? Does she produce a more sympathetic rendering of her subject? Do the Inuit respond and collaborate more openly in their response to the photo making? These questions drew me to Moodie's images initially and kept me returning to reconsider what these photographs signified.

Even in societies where photography is a common and well-accepted practice, by entering a studio a subject symbolically, and to a large extent actually, concedes almost all power to the photographer. In cultures where it is the photography and the photographer that are exotic, the imbalance in favour of the photographer is necessarily even more overwhelming. This is of particular interest when one considers Moodie's approach to producing her Inuit portraits. Rather than photograph people in their homes or in their own environments, she drew upon her pre-Arctic experience as the operator of several commercial studios, in effect creating another one by having all her subjects present themselves before a neutral, cloth backdrop. This strategy enabled Moodie to create the consciously and carefully constructed images of romanticised motherhood required by the colonial imagination and, perhaps less consciously, to represent both the similarities and differences between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized in a single frame.

An aspect of Moodie's approach particularly worthy of discussion is her use of a blank backdrop. Moodie had used backdrops extensively in her studio practice in the south, but a survey of her work from this earlier period shows that in keeping with common practice, these were all carefully painted with scenes that could appropriately background a variety of subjects. For example, Carol Williams has observed that such simple backdrops as Hudson Bay blankets were often used as backdrops when photographing Aboriginal people to sign them as “Indian.” This is because the Hudson Bay blanket was commonly traded with Native people (2003: 122). For whatever reason, most likely because of their weight and size, Moodie did not take her painted backdrops with her to the North, which meant that in setting up her studio, possibly something she had not anticipated, she was forced to improvise, using what appears to be a length of sailcloth. The effect on the perception of a person set upon such a featureless ground is dramatic and powerful. By eliminating all context, the blank backdrop turns a photograph into a display window and anyone set before it into a specimen. This, in turn, significantly enhances the objectification of the subject by concentrating the viewer's attention upon the subjects’ physical appearance, their pose and their costuming. Unsurprisingly, this type of neutral backdrop has been referred to as the “subaltern background,” a site for the objectification of the other. Fabian cites as a common example of such practices the isolation of the other in another time and place, the past, even in cases when the chronological time is actually the present (1983: 1).

This method of representation of the other as an exotic subject or collectable is reminiscent of the of the work of contemporary art and fashion photographer Irving Penn. Penn, like Moodie, uses the camera to create the exotic other as a commodity which he
markets though exhibitions of his art photography and books. Penn’s *Mother and Child, Cuzco, Peru, 1949* (Fig. 2.3) shows how the photographer used a portable studio tent structure in order to create his own world no matter where he was working. Penn’s book *Worlds in a Small Room* consists of a series of this type of portraits of people made while he travelled on assignment for *Vogue*. Martha Rosler has written an essay, “in, around, and afterthought (on documentary photography)” where she discusses how documentary photography “has been used to describe the powerless to the powerful” (Bolton 1993:xvi). She refers to Penn’s series as “an effete mimicry of anthropological documentary” (1993:310). Liz Wells points out that these images tend to collapse the genres of fashion photography and visual anthropology. As she has written:

The images tell us little about the people, but say a lot about Penn’s construction of these people as primitive and exotic. As with the fashion shoot, these images are contrived and stylized, and Penn is at pains to find what is extraordinary and to create the dramatic. The isolated space of the studio removes the subjects from their own time and space... and gives the photographer free rein to create every aspect of the photograph (1997:177).

This decontextualization of place gives Penn’s images, like Moodie’s, a timeless, more universal quality. As Fabian (1983) has observed, it is also used as a strategy to assign otherness.

However, in contrast to Moodie, Penn avoids any naturalism or spontaneity in his portraits, favouring instead much more dramatic poses. For example, in the photograph shown in Figure 2.3, both subjects face the camera, the child slightly in front of her mother, leaning on her for support. Both subjects’ poses appear artificial. The mother holds one hand against her chest, and the child appears to be straining to lift her head up high. The photographer has stylized everything for the camera with the eye of an art director. Formal qualities are stressed: light, shadow and shape as opposed to character or realism. The formal aspects of the images are foregrounded, and the photographer keeps any hint of emotion at arm’s length. The folds in the drapery echo the folds in the subjects’ simple attire. Curiously, Penn has chosen a neutral camera position, looking neither up at,
nor down upon his subjects, thereby minimizing the power imbalance normally apparent in
the photographic exercise. Significantly, the
mother and child have a site of resistance to the
photographer's control: their returned gaze.
Ever so slightly they are able to subvert the
photographer's control of his image by the way in
which they return the camera's gaze. While on
one level they appear to be taking part in the
role play of humble peasant controlled by the
photographer, they are, in fact, sending up
whatever authenticity that Penn intends for his
image. The mother's knowing and steady gaze
remains confident despite her having to adapt
to the contrivance of Penn's posing demands.
This returned gaze, I argue is similar to Bal's
analysis of the postcard that is returned to the
sender, the look of the colonized back to the
colonizer (1996: 220). The mother is in control
of the nature of her own gaze; she looks directly
back at or even through the photographer, as
if to acknowledge the viewer on the other side.
Here she "returns the gaze" to those who treat
her as a spectacle.

In comparing Moodie's work to Penn's, con-
sider, for example, Kukilasak (Kookooleshook) with her baby by another partner, made at Fullerton Harbour, 1904-5 (Fig. 2.4). This image shows clearly the extent to which Moodie is less the art director and more the collaborator than Penn. By permitting a larger, collaborative space her photographs inevitably appear less sophisticated and hence, less contrived. In this image, Moodie's camera presents two seated figures, Kukilasak and her child dressed in traditional clothing. Kukilasak is posed wearing her beaded inner parka, or amautiq, yet the striking relationship between the two
subjects carries the image beyond being a straightforward ethnographic study of costume.
The mother is holding her baby tightly and presenting it to the camera. The soft smile and
easy gaze into the camera are evidence of maternal pride. This is an image about a mother
showing off her child to another woman. She looks directly into the lens, obviously
unintimidated by the situation in which she finds herself yet, at the same time, strongly
protective of the baby in her arms. The photographer has assigned her a sitting pose
that simultaneously downplays the dramatic costume and highlights the relationship
between mother and child. This maternal pride becomes a link between Moodie’s Euro-American culture and that of Inuit; motherhood, a universal to which both can relate, is employed by Moodie as a vehicle of cultural convergence.

Moodie’s work can also be compared to that of her contemporary, the prominent American photographer Gertrude Kasebier, who also photographed motherhood themes. Kasebier’s work is exemplified by Emmeline Stieglitz and Katherine (Kitty) Stieglitz c. 1899 (Fig. 2.5), a portrait of the spouse and daughter of Alfred Stieglitz. Both portraits are made in an unidentified, domestic interior and use a neutral background, the more clearly to focus attention upon the mother and child bond. Both mothers are costumed according to their own culture’s representation of the feminine, signifying the idealization of motherhood popular in photography of the period. The thematic link holds despite the fact that stylistically, the former is more documentary, while the latter relies on the technical exaggerations of Pictorialism. There are other differences between the images. Moodie foregrounds the mother while Kasebier, in keeping with the contrived sentimentality often associated with her aesthetic, places attention upon the child. In Moodie’s portrait, both subjects acknowledge the camera and look directly at it. There is a hint of individuality and the personality in the mother’s facial expression. In the Kasebier portrait, on the other hand, neither subject acknowledges the camera. The mother, who appears in profile, looks devotedly at her child while the child, seemingly full of curiosity about the world beyond the frame, looks away, acknowledging neither mother nor camera. This is one of the significant differences between Kasebier’s mother child studies and much of the work on this subject produced by her contemporaries. Kasebier’s work tends to show doting mothers and self-reliant youngsters eagerly seeking their independence, as opposed to the more clinging children more normally pictured (Michaels 1992:76).

Although both Moodie and Kasebier were professional photographers, Kasebier’s images are clearly the result of their creator’s self-conscious effort to make art. Like other photographers in her circle, Kasebier made extensive use of soft-focus lenses and printing materials impregnated with platinum salts to signal that her images should be seen not as mere photographs, but as skillfully produced, aesthetically imbued objects. In many of her compositions on the mother—child theme, she attempted studies showing the effect of white on white. This was difficult to render technically but imparted to the image an aesthetic mood illustrating the concept popular at this time of the woman as the angel in the house.
In addition to following studio convention, Moodie's work also exhibits the characteristics of ethnographic or documentary style imagery. The trio depicted in *An Inuit Widow with her two children, Fullerton, Harbour, 1904-5* (Fig. 2.6) is typical of the line-up-subject-as-specimen composition favoured by ethnologists when they venture behind the camera. Judging from the family's facial expressions, they were also more apprehensive subjects. The mother is much older and far less elaborately dressed, in a simple, fur, outer parka, than the young mother in the previous photograph. Her expression is more resigned; her face is marked with tattoo lines that signify that she had been married. The children in this image appear more uncomfortable in front of the camera, particularly the young girl to her mother's left who is holding a small fur pouch in front of herself. The three subjects stand next to each other but without physical or eye contact; each confronts the camera alone. The family's seeming discomfort is common in photographs of this type. Cultural critic and film-maker Trinh Minh-ha acknowledges this aversion and gives voice to it, when she writes, “like any common living thing, I fear and reprove classification and the death it entails” (1989: 48).

The family's facial expressions suggest that they were not at all comfortable about being photographed, yet Moodie did so anyway.

The family is positioned in a line, facing the camera with the mother in the centre and the children on each side. This photograph is one of the few in this series where the subjects are standing on fur drop cloths. There is less evidence of cultural assimilation in this photograph than in most of Moodie’s other Inuit portraits. The parkas lack embroidery and, apart from a simple fringed hem, any other decoration. To Euro-American eyes at the time, this traditional, day-to-day clothing would have contributed to a view of the subjects as “ primitives.”

Peter Mason points out that since the Enlightenment, a number of philosophers, including Montaigne, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel, were fascinated with the New World and the idea of the primitive other (1990: 6). Mason links the representation of Native American people to the representation of the other in Europe. He cites the Herodoteans or Plineans, monstrous races characterized by the Greeks as a primitive kind of human and animal hybrid (7). Props such as furs and animal-hide clothing act as signifiers of a primitive hybrid race. For example, an unusual component of the mother's dress.
is a belt strapped in front of her chest on the outside of her parka. It draws attention to her breasts but not in an overtly sensual or sexual manner. It appears instead to be purely of a utilitarian nature and is actually a support for the qaksungauti, or hide girdle, that supports the amaut, or baby pouch, worn on a mother’s back. Like the animal skins, it adds to the primitive ambiance of the image. This photograph, more so than the other mother child images I have read in this section, appears constructed to emphasize otherness and highlight elements of difference with Euro-American culture such as costume.

Moodie’s Fullerton Harbour madonnas do not fit neatly into the genres of either ethnographic photography or studio portrait. The blurring of boundaries between these two forms of visual representation creates a visual tension that makes them more arresting to the viewer. Because, or even in spite of this, these mother-and-child portraits are some of the most compelling examples of Moodie’s professional photographic practice.

FULLERTON HARBOUR GROUP PORTRAITS

While at Fullerton Harbour, Moodie also made a number of group portraits featuring women wearing traditional Inuit dress. Two images representative of this series are Group of Eskimo Women, Fullerton Harbour, c. 1904, (Fig. 2.7) and Iwilik Women, Fullerton Harbour, c. 1904–05, (Fig. 2.10). Most of her Fullerton Harbour photographs appear to have been made at the same time and feature some of the same women. For example, three of the women in the larger group portrait (Fig. 2.7) also appear in the portrait of the trio (Fig. 2.10). Both of these images appear to have been made at the same time.

The photograph of the six Inuit women (Fig. 2.7) is exceptional. It depicts an openness seldom apparent in photographs made by Euro-Americans of Aboriginal women. Despite their cultural differences, these women appear comfortable being photographed by another woman. The image features five young women carefully grouped around another, possibly an older relative. There is a baby peeking over the shoulder of the young woman on the far left. She is Kukilasak, whom Moodie photographed alone with her child in Figure 2.4. The child and all the women look directly into the camera in a comfortable, nonconfrontational, returned gaze. The central figure is singled out by her dominant position within the frame and her more elaborate hair ornamentation. Her long wrapped braids signify that she has given birth to a male child (Eber 1989: 115). She is the Aivillik woman, Niviatsinaq, whose whaling name was “Shooofly.”

Her close relationship with Captain Comer, a whaling ship master, had made her one of the most often photographed Inuit women in the area, and it is therefore perhaps not surprising that she appears more at ease and confident in front of the camera than the others. The dress she is wearing and the images embroidered on the front of her now famous attigii make this photograph a remarkable record of acculturation in process. Represented on the attigii are magnetic compasses, high-heeled, European-style boots and on the left, written in English, Niviatsinaq’s whaling name, Shooofly. An even more obvious

15 See Kobayashi Issenman cited in Rholem (2001) for a discussion of traditional Inuit clothing. Issenman is associated with the Department of Costume and Textiles and the Department of Ethnology and Archaeology of the McCord Museum of Canadian History in Montreal. See also Issenman (1997).
indicator is the printed fabric dresses worn beneath the parkas of both Shoofly and her companion, dresses that Shoofly quite likely made herself as she is known to have owned a sewing machine and to have received gifts of cloth from Captain Comer.

Western-style dresses often appear in formal photographs of Inuit women made in this period and, together with the highly decorated attigi, give a clear indication as to the importance assigned to the picture-making session. These are not everyday clothes but rather something these women either have chosen or been instructed to wear for a special occasion. Consider, for instance, the practicality of the traditional leggings worn by the woman on the far left, a design perfected over thousands of years of adaptation to the harsh realities of a nomadic, Arctic hunter culture and then, in comparison, imagine how utterly ill-suited is a cotton skirt to the same circumstances. The presence of such clothing shows how the culture was changing, indicating the development of more fixed communities and more secure food supplies. Quite simply, European-style dresses were luxuries that could not have been accommodated by a traditional Inuit culture, but were reserved for special occasions such as attending dances on the visiting ships or, in this case, being photographed.

Thus, while to western eyes the presence of these exotic, assimilatory costumes can make Moodie’s Arctic photographs seem theatrical, in actual fact there is really little difference between them and those she had been making in her more established studios in the south. Fundamentally, the photographs are conventional, early twentieth-century studio portraits. Just as she would have done in her previous studios, Moodie set up a backdrop against which to photograph. While in the south, with the luxury of a permanent facility, this would most often have been one of a number of painted scenes from which a selection would have been made appropriate to the particular subject. For example, consider the two following portraits both made in Moodie’s southern studios.

*Officers of “C” Division, Battleford, posed in Moodie’s Studio, c. 1895-96 (Fig. 2.8)* records a group of North West Mounted Police (NWMP) officers. The selected backdrop resembles an elegant drawing room, perhaps in an officers’ club in a large, eastern Canadian city. The painted window on the left side of the frame has a highly decorated, neo-classical arch, certainly not something represented in any of the buildings then existing in the small,
frontier village of Battleford. These men were living in a relatively crude, military barracks in the center of the Canadian Prairies, making the grandeur suggested by this backdrop a ludicrous illusion.

A Young Cree Woman and Boy Taken in the Maple Creek Studio, (Fig. 2.9) was made about a year later shows another of her painted backdrops. The child is posed on a rather unlikely looking tussock, and grass or straw has been spread about in a vain attempt to turn the studio floor into a meadow. The woman, who may be a sister or possibly his very young mother, stands beside him dressed in an amalgam of traditional and western clothing. This time, for a background, Moodie has selected a simulated outdoor setting: a romantic, misty woodland scene perhaps even more alien to the actual environment from which the subjects hail than was the background in the earlier, Battleford image. The Cree of that part of Saskatchewan are a Plains people, and the vista from Moodie’s studio door would have encompassed only a treeless, rolling prairie for as far as the eye could see. It is amusing to note that in the lower right corner a black line clearly reveals where the backdrop doesn’t quite reach the floor which itself, in this spot, for some reason Moodie has failed to disguise with grass. At times one almost has the impression that like a clever magician, Moodie can’t quite resist revealing the trick.

In the north however, Moodie was forced to improvise her backdrops, with the closest thing she could find being a length of canvas, most likely a spare sail from the supply ship. Her subjects are just as carefully posed as in her earlier work; the camera positions she chooses for different subjects are consistent with the conventions of her day. The lighting is rather more erratic, but again, this was an improvised setting and she worked with what she had. The costuming, too, is no more than one would expect. Even today, when people go to a photographer to have their picture taken, they dress up in their best; they want to present themselves as favourably as possible. Whether suggested by Moodie or not, I believe that the appearance of the women in fig. 2.7 is motivated by a similar desire.

What is less conventional about this particular image, however, is its loose framing, which measured by studio portrait standards of the day appears careless and unfinished. The edges of the background are clearly visible. This allows the viewer to see how the image is constructed, effectively destroying the illusionary atmosphere usual to such studio photographs. While not uncommon to see negatives like this even from the most accomplished photographers, it is surprising that Moodie should have chosen not to crop...
away these peripheries in the final print. Comparable to the nail hole in Mieke Bal’s reading of Vermeer’s Woman Holding a Balance, what caught my attention in the image, the punctum, was the small hook fastened to the wall, hidden in the shadows on the lower left side of the picture — a hook I took to be a part of the rigging necessary to assembling the backdrop. Not visible in reproductions, I only became aware of it when I viewed an 8" x 10" enlargement at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Museum in Regina. In seeing behind the scenes of one of Moodie’s photographs, I could come to terms with the true nature of her work and understand its apparent contradictions. It became clear that it is precisely due to her rigorous application of the techniques of conventional studio practice that her images are not straightforward documentary, ethnographic studies, but rather visually constructed, theatrical scenes. Moodie was the focalizer whose prescriptive use of a particular photographic practice led her, perhaps unconsciously, but certainly inevitably, to construct images of her subjects as other.

Iwilik Women, Fullerton Harbour, c. 1904–05, (Fig. 2.10) on the other hand, is a work that today we would categorize as visual anthropology, a term introduced into the photographic lexicon in the 1930s by John Collier Jr., a photographer with the U.S. Farm Security Administration. Collier described any photographic record of a documentary nature that allowed “the comparative measurement of specimen subjects and spaces in isolation... as visual anthropology” (Tagg 1988: 12).“ The form of Moodie’s image, which portrays three women modeling their traditional Inuit costumes, conforms almost exactly to this description. Shoofly, the central figure, has been posed in profile, looking off to the right of the camera, so as to best display the back of her richly decorated, inner parka. The parka back is embroidered with beadwork that includes three symbols that resemble magnetic compasses, as well as the image of a kneeling hunter taking aim at a caribou (Eber 1989: 115). Shoofly is flanked on each side by two of the younger women who appear with her in the previous, larger, group portrait (Fig. 2.7). They look directly into the camera. The print shows only a portion of what must have been the original negative, a hand-cut, oval over-matte having been applied to give greater emphasis to the central figure. While undoubtedly this was done to make the image more pictorially attractive, the women here clearly lack the presence they exhibit in the previous photograph. This is not a portrait of individuals so much as it is a photograph of three costumes, the women having been reduced to the role of racially stereotypical mannequins. They are appropriately exotic but interchangeable, a document of the decorative other.

This is fully in keeping with the application by both Alan Sekula and John Tagg of Foucault’s concept of archive to photography. In his collection of essays The Burden of Representation, Tagg discusses the implication of photography in differential power relationships. For example, the systematization of criminal records that began in 1880 used photographic records of frontal and profile views of arrestees’ heads to document lawbreakers. These became known as “mug shots.” In its similar approach, Moodie’s
photograph is clearly more reminiscent of this genre than of portraiture. Tagg argues that this type of documentary photography is about power relationships. Consider, in particular, this passage that could have been written with Moodie’s trio in mind:

Documentary photography traded on the status of the official document as proof and inscribed relations of power in representation which was structured like those earlier practices of photo-documentation: both speaking to those with relative power about those positioned lacking, as the “feminized” Other, as passive but pathetic objects capable only of offering themselves up to a benevolent, transcendent gaze — the gaze of the camera and the gaze of the paternal state (Tagg 1988: 12).

In Moodie’s image, this is exactly what the three Inuit women do; they offer themselves to the camera’s gaze. They are submissive, decorative and pinned to the backdrop like exotic butterflies upon a card, part of a collected archive of the other. Tagg also discusses
how early photographic recording became a kind of “ethnographic theatre in which the supposed authenticity and interrelationships of gesture, behaviour and location were essential to the ‘documentary’ value of the representation” (12). In other words, while photography may be used as a tool to collect evidence — that is, what is true and by implication therefore the only real version of the real for those caught within its dispassionate gaze — it is frequently not only a manufactured reality but also a reality manufactured by and for someone else. As Fabian has argued, the photographed becomes anthropology’s constructed other.

Such is the fate of the women in Moodie’s photograph. Set against a plain, canvas backdrop they are completely separated from any meaningful context, out of place and frozen in time. Not even the conceit of an artistic over-matte can disguise the fundamental nature of this image; it is an archival record of the acquisition by one culture of another, and thus, an “active agent for the construction of colonialism” (Hartman 1999:5).

Allan Sekula’s essay “The Body and the Archive” analyzes how photography can be used as a “double system” of celebration or repression, to show either a ceremonial presentation of self or “establish and delimit the terrain of the other” (cited in Bolton 1993:xvii). This can be seen in two other portrait studies made by Moodie at Fullerton Bay in 1904. The first, Native Women in Gala Dress (Figure 2.11), shows another trio of Inuit women, all of whom are wearing traditional inner parkas. The figure in the centre can be identified from other photographs as a woman whose whaling name was Jennie. Not particularly interesting in itself, this image gains significance from its relationship to another photograph, apparently made at the same time and featuring two of the same women, although in this instance, presented in Western dress (Figure 2.12).

This second image, Native Women Dressed for a Dance, Fullerton, 1904, shows Jennie and one of her companions from the first photograph, their long hair loose, wearing dresses made of lightweight, floral, cotton fabric. The waistline of the dresses is accented by woven sashes similar to those worn by the white fur traders of the period. Both women are wearing hats richly decorated with flowers and ribbons. Captioned by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Archives in Regina, “Hattie and Jennie dressed for a dance in clothing imported for them by the whale men,” a more detailed description appears in a letter from Moodie’s great granddaughter, Joan Eldridge, which I discovered in the Moodie file at the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa.  

17 Eldridge writes:
I have a partial diary of J.D.'s on the "Arctic" and he mentions dances on the boat and the schooner. Capt. Comer's diary 1903-04 also mentions them. In Capt. Comer's diary there is a photo attributed to "Grace" Moodie, which is 2 Eskimo women dressed in white woman's long dresses — to neck and wrists. They wear crazy flat looking hats highly decorated and worn on the sides of their heads. (I am checking statistics in Toronto to see if Geraldine was ever known by the name, "Grace").

This image is another of Moodie's ethnographic studio portrait hybrids. It reveals a fascinating site of cultural intersection and foregrounds issues related to the performance of identity and culture. Why, for instance, were these Inuit women prepared to don Western dress? Were they trying to become the other by representing themselves in the costume of the powerful alien culture? Who were they trying to please, themselves or the white whalers who hosted the shipboard dances? In either case, to whose standard of desirability or beauty, were they responding? Or, perhaps, were their motivations a more complex combination of these? Lacking any record of direct testimony, whatever answers there are to these questions can, at best, never be more than informed speculation. What is clear from the photograph, however, is that both women appear confident and almost pleased with being able to display themselves to the camera costumed as white women. In Chapter Four I will consider some of the other women photographers who photographed aboriginal women in a similar manner, including the most well known, American Pictorialist Gertrude Kaesbier.

As with the mother and child portraits, these group portraits made at Fullerton Harbour were clearly photographic hybrids that drew on both Moodie's experience as a studio portraitist in the south and her desire to accommodate Euro-Canadian curiosity about the Inuit other. Moodie's Arctic portraits were double-edged; they both celebrated and commodified their Inuk subjects.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

There is one further image from this series that I wish to discuss. I have separated my reading of this image from Moodie's other Fullerton Harbour portraits because it is singular and arresting and, for me, acts as a metaphor for all of Moodie's Arctic images. The photograph, Koo-tuck-tuck, deaf mute Eskimo girl, Cape Fullerton, Hudson Bay, 1905-6 (Fig. 2.13), shows a young, Inuk woman standing in shadow pulling back Moodie's thick backdrop curtain. Canadian writer and collector of oral histories Dorothy Harley Eber
argues that Moodie’s Arctic images are a kind of Rosetta Stone to unlock the past. On the surface, and in the case of the Koo-tuck-tuck portrait quite literally, these portraits allow us to peek behind the curtain for glimpses into another culture. Equally, our reaction to those glimpses becomes a measure of our own. In 1991, Eber was able to trace stories about the Inuit people who are portrayed in Moodie’s photographs by taking the images back into the North and discussing them with the Inuit elders who remembered them. In the case of Koo-tuck-tuck, Eber’s informant, Joan Attuat, described a life of hardship. She focussed on Koo-tuck-tuck’s ability to do almost everything, de-emphasizing her inability to speak by stressing her singing. She spoke too of the loss of her children to adoption following the death of her husband, a common traditional practice. On the other hand, Eber observes that the Koo-tuck-tuck photographs have always attracted particular attention from “southerners” because of Koo-tuck-tuck’s “compelling good looks” and because Moodie had written “Deaf and Dumb” beneath some of the photos (1994: 21). This raises the question as to the relevance of such information. No doubt Moodie was well aware that the caption would change the way this young woman would be perceived and that stressing her disability would make her even more exotic and thus desirable to her prospective audience. This assessment is reinforced by the fact that although like many of the other women in the Fullerton portrait series, Moodie has posed Koo-tuck-tuck in a highly ornamented, inner parka; uniquely, she had photographed her with her hair loose. This is entirely at odds with the traditional costume and is surely a further attempt to increase her appeal to Western viewers, a clear example of Bal’s “aesthethotics.”

I first encountered this photograph in 1984 in Sometimes a Great Nation, a book formatted like a pseudo photo album in which writer and critic Ed Cavell discusses images associated with Canadian nationalism. The photograph was also used by the British Museum for Imaging the Arctic (1998), a conference-related publication that included a number of Moodie’s photographs and featured Koo-tuck-tuck as the cover girl. In the introduction, J.C.H. King and Henrietta Lidchi, both from the British Museum’s Department of Ethnography, comment on how “by virtue of the pose and Koo-tuck-tuck’s provocative stance, the photograph lends itself to a semiological reading” (12).

King and Lidchi suggest that the lifting of the curtain signals a tempting of the viewer to look deeper into the image, to see what truth might hide behind the curtain and behind the image: Koo-tuck-tuck seems to be signaling that what we see is not all there is, but that there are further, as yet undisclosed, truths lying beyond the curtain and behind the image (1998: 13).

I propose that Koo-tuck-tuck represents the viewer who, caught as a spectator looking in through Silverman’s keyhole, then becomes the spectacle herself. For Silverman, the keyhole derives from Jean Paul Sartre’s site of what he calls le regard. This is the keyhole...
Figure 2.13
Koo-tuck-tuck, deaf mute Eskimo girl, Cape Fullerton, Hudson Bay, 1905-6, gelatin silver print, British Museum, London
in the door where when the voyeur is captured watching, he becomes aware of "being seen" (Silverman 1996: 164). This keyhole, I argue, is similar to the camera lens through which Moodie viewed the world. Like Gunterman, Koo-tuck-tuck is caught by the camera, as a self-aware spectacle. By pulling aside the backdrop curtain before which she and her people were photographed, by disclosing the constructed nature of the image, Koo-tuck-tuck makes the viewer aware of the romanticized artificiality of all such images. For even Moodie, despite the obvious sympathy she has toward her subjects, cannot entirely subvert the objectifying tendency inherent to all formalized, photographic portraiture — a tendency that too often leads to a representation of subject as other, a conversion of individual uniqueness to cultural icon. Koo-tuck-tuck is trapped out of place and out of time, forever on display for the spectator against the blank backdrop. Despite her gesture, we can never really know what is behind the curtain.

This photograph has parallels with another "curtain" image, the frontispiece image reproduced in Barthes' Camera Lucida. It is a monochromatic, blue image of a bed and a blowing curtain entitled Polaroid, made by the French photographer Daniel Boudinet. The curtain is dense and seemingly impenetrable; however, a small crack at the bottom allows a fragment of light onto a bed that appears in front of it. Neither the image nor Boudinet are mentioned in the text of Barthes' book. The photograph is enigmatic and, like Moodie's young woman at the curtain, functions as a metaphor for the power of the photograph to allow us to look into other worlds, including the past.

Boudinet's image raises a significant question, succinctly expressed by Hirsch: “[o]nly words could pull back the curtain, but can words reveal, can they empower us to imagine what's behind the surface of the image?” (1997: 2). For me, Moodie's photograph of Koo-tuck-tuck elicits the same response: Can words offer any hope of penetrating the mystery of the image? It is this enigma that gives the image its punctum, the deep irony of having this young, deaf-mute, Inuit girl so startlingly and forever present in the photograph, who at the same time is so utterly beyond knowing as anything other than other. While Moodie has given Koo-tuck-tuck voice, it is not and never can be hers, but only a composite of the varied insight and misconstruance of those who behold her photograph. As Barthes has stated, the photograph transforms the “there-then” to the “here-now” (1977: 44). In that forever frozen present, we can do no more than accept her invitation to step into the photograph, to share with her its stillness and its silence.

In this chapter I have explored the relationship between self and other as evidenced in the work of Geraldine Moodie, a professional photographer who made pictures of Indigenous people in the Canadian West at the beginning of the twentieth century. A strong, ambitious white woman, Moodie gained privileged access to the Canadian Arctic where she produced a striking series of portraits of Inuit thanks to her marriage to a high-ranking NWMP officer. As I have argued, in making these photographs, Moodie was
influenced both by her cultural background and her experience as a commercial studio photographer. Stylistically, Moodie's work is similar to that of others of the time. Her images are distinguished, though, by the sympathetic quality of the reciprocal gaze they reveal, particularly in those that portray family relationships. This mutual understanding and respect is less evident in the work of Moodie's predominantly male contemporaries whose work generally conforms more to a style of image making categorized as ethno-graphic.

Despite this apparent sensitivity, Moodie's photographs still reflect the prevailing attitude of the dominant, non-native culture toward the indigenous peoples. Vine Deloria, a leading Native American scholar and a Standing Rock Sioux, describes such images well when he refers to the photography of Moodie's era as being “a weapon in the final skirmishes of cultural warfare in which the natives of North America could be properly and finally embedded in their places in the cultural evolutionary incline.” (cited in the preface, Lyman 1982). Moodie's photographs do pull back a curtain to expose the past and its inherent hierarchy of difference between the “white” and native cultures.

Moodie's portraits of Inuk people are clearly situated at a crossroads between the ethnographic and the aesthetic. In this chapter, I have discussed this aspect of her photography and analyzed some of the key concepts and issues present in her images of Aboriginal people. I return again to Moodie and further explore her relationship to the colonizing camera in Chapter Four. There I compare her photographic practice to other so-called shadowcatchers both from her era and from the present in order to understand it within the framework of the representation of otherness.